SUSTAINABILITY AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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(2400329)

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THESIS STATEMENT

The achievement of organisational performance (OP) dimensions counting: financial performance (FP), operational performance (OPP), market performance (MP) and growth performance (GP)., and sustainability dimensions including its environmental sustainability **(ES)**, economic sustainability **(ECOS)**, social sustainability **(SS)** and cultural sustainability **(CS)** dimensions of small and medium enterprises **(SMEs)** and particularly those operating in South Africa are enabled, and at the same time challenged by the same factors such as: organisational factors **(OFs)** or corporate factors **(CFs)**, management factors **(MFs)**, business factors **(BFs)**, entrepreneurial factors **(EFs)**, leadership factors **(LFs)**, modernity features **(MOFs)**, and sustainable factors **(SFs), which** are simply sustainability related-components moreover, although sustainable development **(SD)**, sustainable development goals **(SDGs)**, organisational changes **(OC)**, lean management **(LM)**, sustainable corporate governance **(SCG)**, sustainable supply chain management **(SCM)**, circular economy **(CE)**, and corporate sustainable responsibility **(CSR)** as well as others related sustainability practices **(SPs)** sustainability related-aspects are implemented in some of this industry, however, they are suggested to be incorporated into and balanced in the overall organisational performance for the achievement of sustainable SMEs' performance in general and sustainable South African SMEs' performance in particular.

ABSTRACT

This study adopted the method of a qualitative integrative literature review to investigate the sustainability and organisational performance (OP) of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa (SA). The focus was on enablers to facilitate the attainment and the challenges impeding sustainability and organisational performance. Furthermore, the study examined the phases and steps to incorporate sustainability into organisational performance, as well as the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability within organisations. For the better understanding of the topic and to ensure that it has been consistently and sufficiently covered without missing any aspect of OP and sustainability phenomenon, the study integrated the four OP dimensions, namely financial, operational, market and growth performance, at the same time considering the environmental, social, economic, and cultural pillars of sustainability.

The e-resources from the online library of the University of Witwatersrand were used for the selection of appropriate databases. The reading materials included academic articles, journals, conference papers, reports, dissertations, theses, handbooks, and books, and the collection of 5000 works of literature from the management field were transcribed and categorised in a comprehensive fashion to be assessed using content and thematic analysis. Of the 5000 reviewed literature publications, 2 947 (including SA literature) were excluded due to duplication, the size of the firms not mentioned, the incomplete (full version unavailable), outside the scope of interest of SMEs and SA SMEs, and not aligned with the research questions. The remaining 2 053 literature publications were selected for discussion and interpretation; of these 1 625 included SMEs in general and 428 SA SMEs. The comprehensive appendix of the collected literature provides validity and credibility to the findings. Ethical clearance was obtained from Wits Business School to conduct the study and all ethics were adhered to. The study implemented the theory of knowledge to conduct the literature review and contingency theory to build new theories.

The findings revealed that the achievements of organisational performance and sustainability of SMEs in general, and particularly those located in South Africa, were enabled and challenged by organisational factors **(OFs)** or corporate factors **(CFs)**, management factors **(MFs)**, business factors **(BFs)**, entrepreneurial factors **(EFs)**, leadership factors **(LFs)**, modernity factors **(MOFs)**, and sustainable factors **(SFs).** Sustainable development **(SD),** sustainable development goals **(SDGs),** organisational changes **(OC),** the circular economy

(CE), lean management **(LM)**, sustainable corporate governance **(SCG)**, corporate sustainable responsibility **(CSR)** and sustainable supply chain management **(SCM)**, and other related sustainability practices **(SPs)** were implemented. Some sustainability pillars besides cultural sustainability were integrated and balanced in the OP of SMEs without mentioning the sequential sustainability implementation phases, integration steps and balance approaches. In addition, there is limited literature on sustainability and OP covering the SA context, leaving room for future research

The findings of the reviewed literature were built by identifying the gaps in the literature, the construction of an integrated categorical-conceptual framework, the development of a contextual framework, developing novel theories, and business model designs including successful sustainable SMEs' business performance. Furthermore, most of the reviewed literature was quantitative, therefore, future studies should consider using other research approaches. Further analysis revealed little to no mention of cultural sustainability. Although there is literature covering sustainability in SA SMEs, and OP of SA SMEs, it remains limited. Likewise, there is limited literature covering the implementation of sustainability in OP, as well as sustainability integration into OP, moreover, no published research could be found that covered the approaches to sustainability balance in SA SMEs. The analysis of all the literature reviewed for this study revealed steps to guide sustainability implementation and integration into OP as well as suggesting approaches for balancing sustainability in OP.

Key words: sustainability achievement, organisational performance (OP) achievement, small and medium enterprises' (SMEs) performance, South Africa (SA)

DECLARATION

I, **CHANTAL MBALA BANGA**, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Philosophy of Doctor of Management at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: CHANTAL Signature: *Chantal Banga CBBM*

Signed at ……PRETORIA……

On the ……30…….. day of ……APRIL…… 2025…..

DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral study to my beloved husband, **Doctor Jose Kadima Bukasa**, and my two beautiful daughters, **Anne Banga Bukasa** and **Berenice Kampoyi Bukasa**. The completion of this laborious academic programme would not have been possible without all your immeasurable support and love.

A special dedication in loving memory of my father, **Etienne Mbala Mukuna**, and my lovely mother, **Alphonsine Bukumba Banga**, as well as my three late elder brothers, **Alphonse Luboya Mbala**, **Professor Alexis Tshibalabala Kankolongo Mbala Bruno**, and **Claude Bukasa Mbala.** I miss you dearly.

Lastly, I respectfully dedicate this doctoral thesis to all female students who have been victims of sexual harassment and never received justice. Moreover, this is also dedicated to all disadvantaged little girls and feminine youth, as well as physically handicapped women, widows, and unfavourable women in the four corners of Africa and the rest of the world, who have been victims of any form of violence and injustice, as well as those who have been despised and rejected by their family members and society and aspire to walk onward and upward.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Developed theories		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	CTSOP	Contingency Theory of Successful Organisational Performance
02	CTSS	Contingency Theory of Successful Sustainability
03	CTSust.OP	Contingency Theory of Sustainable Organisational Performance
04	CTUnsust.OP	Contingency Theory of Unsustainable Organisational Performance
05	CTUOP	Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Organisational Performance
06	CTUS	Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Sustainability

Factors enabling and challenging organisational performance and sustainability		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	BFs	Business factors
02	CFs	Corporate factors
03	EFs	Entrepreneurial factors
04	LFs	Leadership factors
05	MFs	Management factors
06	MOFs	Modernity factors
07	OFs	Organisational factors
08	SFs	Sustainable factors

Organisational performance dimensions		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	FP	Financial Performance
02	GP	Growth Performance
03	MP	Market Performance
04	NFP	Non-Financial Performance
05	OP	Organisational Performance
06	OPP	Operational Performance

Supportive theories used		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	CT	Contingency theory
02	ET	Entrepreneurship theory
03	LT	Leadership theory
04	MT	Management theory
05	OT	Organisation theory
06	RBV	Resource-based view
07	ST	Sustainability theories
08	TB	Theory of business

Sustainability aspects implemented		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	SD	Sustainable Development
02	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
03	OC	Organisational Changes

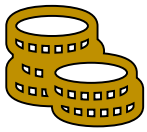
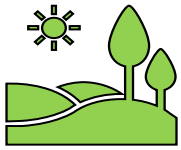
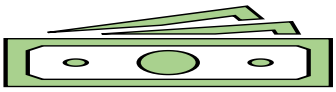
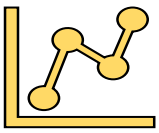
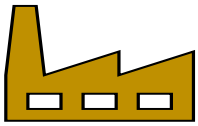
04	SC	Sustainable Circularity
05	CE	Circular Economy
06	LM	Lean Management
07	SCG	Sustainable Corporate Governance
08	SCR	Sustainable Corporate Responsibility
09	CSR	Corporate Sustainable Responsibility
10	SCM	Sustainable Supply Chain Management

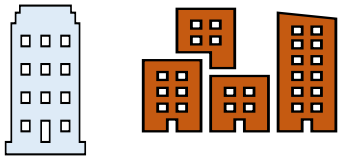
Sustainability dimensions		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	ECOS	Economic Sustainability
02	ES	Environmental Sustainability
03	SS	Social Sustainability
04	CS	Cultural Sustainability

Other acronyms		
Nbr	**Acronyms**	**Meanings**
01	CG	Corporate Governance
02	HR	Human Resource
03	ICT	Information Communication and Technology
04	IT	Information technology
05	MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
06	SA	South Africa
07	SA SMEs	South African Small and Medium Enterprises
08	SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises

09	(SMMEs)	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
10	ROI	Return on investments

LIST OF ICONS

Nbr	Icons	Meanings
01		*Cultural Sustainability Dimension*
02		*Economic Sustainability Dimension*
03		*Environmental Sustainability Dimension*
04		*Financial Performance Dimension*
05		*Growth Performance Dimension*
06		*Market Performance Dimension*
07		*Organisational Performance*
08		*Operational Performance Dimension*
09		*Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) using sustainability*

10		*Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with bad organisational performance and without sustainability*
11		*Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with good organisational performance*
12		*Social Sustainability Dimension*
13		*South African context*
14		*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*
15		*Sustainable Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) performance*
16		*Sustainability*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The merger of organisational performance (OP) and sustainability has gained the attention of academics and practitioners from various backgrounds. Sustainability and organisational performance, also referred to as a firm's performance (Rajasekar & Jeyasutharsan, 2013). Business performance (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015) is important to organisations regardless of their size, age, location, and type, such as profit or non-profit (Abu-Jarad, et al., 2010). However, business sustainability (incorporating organisational performance) is the current and primary management problem in organisations (Iqbal & Yilmaz, 2014). This served as the rationale for focusing on these two phenomena in this study.

The topic of sustainability and OP is very broad. Given the broadness of these two subjects, and for better understanding. it was necessary to offer an overview of each of them throughout this chapter. This introductory chapter presents the background and contextual information required to address the objectives of this study. The sub-sections in this chapter focus on the two key phenomena under study, namely sustainability and organisational performance (OP), specifically in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in general and particularly in the South African geographical context.

The remainder of Chapter 1 is structured as follows: **Section 1.2** is background information, **Section 1.3** discusses the context of the study, **Section 1.4** introduces the research problem, Section **1.5** is the purpose of the study, **Section 1.6** presents the research objectives, **Section 1.7** includes the research questions, while research assumptions are formulated in **Section 1.8.** The rationale for the study is presented in **Section 1.9,** the significance of the study is presented in **Section 1.10**, **Section 1.11** discusses the demarcation and scope of the study, and **Section 1.12** focuses on defining the key terms. Finally, **Section 1.13** focuses on the chapter layout of this thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section discusses the background information, allowing for a better understanding of the two phenomena (sustainability and OP) and laying a foundation for the study. This section provides background information regarding the achievement of OP and the implementation, integration, and balance of sustainability in the performance of organisations. The following sub-section provides background information on the achievement of organisational performance.

1.2.1 Organisational performance achievement

According to Cavaleri and Shabana (2018), the existence of an organisation is included in a complex dynamic system. The reason why organisations pursue optimal performance (Fischbacher-Smith & Fischbacher-Smith, 2016) is that their activities are influenced by organisational performance (OP) (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012). Thus, OP may play important roles in the successful realisation of companies' activities.

OP plays various roles (Ugheoke, 2021), especially in strategic management (Wijesekara, et al., 2016). This is the reason it has received much attention in strategic planning and implementation (Purusottama, 2020) and became the focal point of management practices (Fontannaz & Oosthuizen, 2007), and the interactive determinant of several management control schemes (Mupani, 2016). However, at all management levels, OP remains the most strategic problem (Iqbal & Yilmaz, 2014). Likewise, it has been succumbed to considerable misshapenness as the principal factor of organisations' success (Purusottama, 2020), and healthy performance is not enough in the highly competitive milieu of today (Yahya & Ha, 2014). This might reduce the significance of this managerial instrument in the organisation. To this end, seeking tactics to achieve OP might help the response to the quests of management.

For the past thirty years, OP has been a focal area of interest among organisational theorists (Maltz, et al., 2003) and has been reviewed in various academic publications and journals (de Vries, et al., 2008). Indeed, Adeoye and Elegunde (2012) established the attention of OP gained by students, academics, and practitioners. Yet, despite the numerous studies conducted in this area, research on OP remains less prevalent than in the past (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015). This

highlights the increasing interest in OP research. The topic requires further investigation, especially in the management discipline, while considering contemporary concerns among organisations.

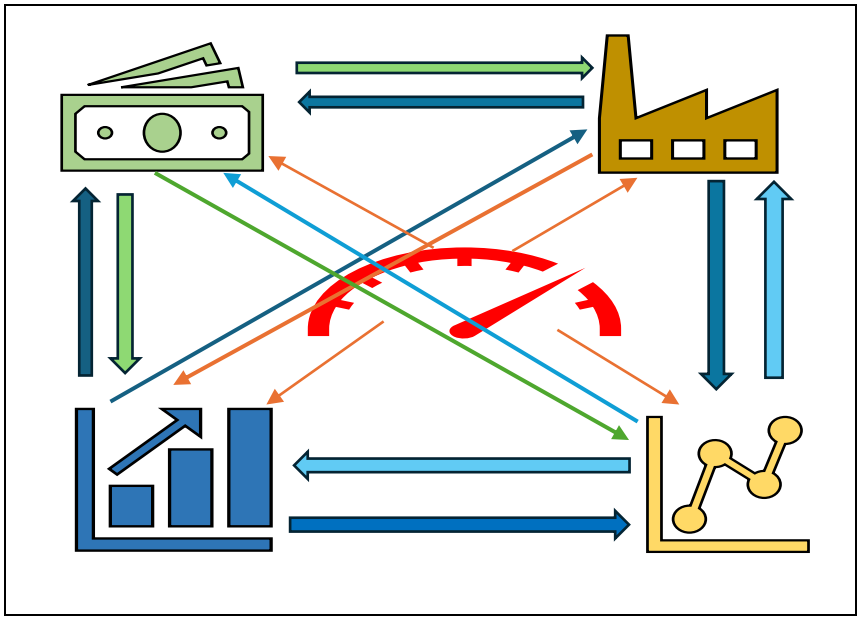
OP is the ability of an organisation to achieve its goals (Ejere & Abasilim, 2013), and objectives (Apriani, et al., 2023) as well as its target (Nene & Pillay, 2019), which justifies organisational objectives and business achievement links (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015). In other words, the achievement of companies' objectives, goals and targets can be ensured only if n OP system is well established.

To clarify the above, accomplishment is the contemporary definition of performance rooted in the old French ***parfournir*** (to perform) (Aubry, et al., 2007). Indeed, preceding, current or upcoming achievement against pre-set known standards of accuracy, wholeness, worth or time are referred to as performance (Wadongo & Abdel-Kader, 2014). Performance might be viewed as the achievement of the overall organisations' performance (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019), at all levels of the company from top down.

Several companies give the appearance of doing well from an outside view, while inside the situation is not going according to plan. Sometime the goals are achieved for the owners of the business, but not for the company itself and its members. The achievement of goals should benefit the company, its workers and top management. However, it happens that a company does not achieve any goals at all. Besides this, the achievement of goals, objectives, and targets should be considered in terms of the overall perspectives of OP.

A phenomenon cannot exist without its constituents. Remarkable OP is characterised by numerous elements (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015) and diverse standpoints (Khana & Naeem, 2018) referred to as ***financial and non-financial indicators*** (Khan, et al., 2019) obtained from baseline measurements of the organisation's progress (Mearns & Boshoff, 2017) as displayed in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1: Organisational performance dimensions' framework



Source: Author's own

Figure 1.1 illustrates the overall OP, which includes the indicator and its four dimensions along with their interconnections, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The red icon in the middle of Figure 1.1 represents OP and the needle (gauge) refers to the measurement (Mudjijah, et al., 2022) and is an indicator of measures. The indicator displays each dimension which is the state of the entire company in terms of its achievement or failure; it can also identify the need for corrective measures and requirements for the improvement of every perspective. Without the gauge and the needle (red icon in Figure 1.1) representing OP, it might be difficult to be aware of the organisations' state.

One cannot talk about OP without mentioning its respective perspectives derived from its measurement. In Figure 1.1, the green icon symbolises ***financial performance (FP)*** known as accounting measures (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021) and ***performance metrics*** (de Brito & de Oliveira, 2016), which have been investigated by numerous scholars, such as: Moreira-Mero, et al. 2020; Thanh, et al, 2021; Fernando, et al., 2022). The remaining icons symbolised ***non-financial performance (NFP)*** (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Ismail-Salaheldin, 2009; Qamruzzaman, & Karim & 2020). Figure 1.1 illustrates OP, its main components, and their

relationships. It should be assumed that the components are parts of OP and OP determines the state of its components. All NFP components are described below.

The brown icon in Figure 1.1 represents ***operational performance (OPP)*** (Hoque, 2004; Shaw, et al. 2021; Karim & Qamruzzaman, 2020); the blue icon is a symbol of ***market performance (MP)*** (Green, et al., 2007; Issau & Soni, 2019; Al-bawaia, et al.2022;), and lastly, the orange icon represents ***growth performance (GP)*** (Pinho, et al., 2014; Le & Phan 2017; Kurniati, 2019). Previously ***non-monetary performance*** (Oyerinde, et al., 2018) has been ignored in the literature. Nevertheless, various ***financial and non-financial dimensions*** should be used (Serfontein & Hough, 2011). The use of these two dimensions (financial and non-financial) might allow the performance of companies to be viewed from various angles.

OP can be described and measured in a diverse manner (Rašula, et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the measurement of OP has been problematic (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015), as a result of the difficultly in defining OP itself (Sawaean & Ali, 2021), and the existing diversity of OP (Oyerinde, et al., 2018). In an attempt to address this, one should look to break down OP into its main components where all facets of OP are considered, which would reduce the difficulty of measuring its dimensions.

In addition to the above, performance can be viewed as a single category or as both financial and non-financial performance (Shiu & Yu, 2010), however, using a single indicator is inadequate and unsuitable (Ejere & Abasilim, 2013; Kohont & Zajc, 2019). Modern organisations should consider the use of the two dimensions as these are recommended for the effectiveness of performance measurement, which is essential for their success. FP is the only perspective of the financial dimension, while non-financial performance is another perspective discussed below.

Referring to OP achievement mentioned earlier in this section, such attainment might involve ***financial and non-financial achievements*** (Fasanya & Onakoya, 2013; Govuzela & Mafini, 2019); especially ***FP achievement*** (Wang, et al., 2015; Mudjijah, et al., 2022), ***OPP achievement*** (Ngo & Le, 2023), ***MP achievement*** (Al-bawaia, et al., 2022), and ***GP achievement*** (Ngatno & Apriatni, 2016). To track and measure this, the organisation requires a reliable performance system. Companies need to be aware of key factors that allow the achievement of each performance dimension.

The two central dimensions of OP are obtained from baseline measurements of the organisation' progress (Mearns & Boshoff, 2017). These two categories of performance, i.e. financial and non-financial, are meant to attain the pre-set goals for the success of the company, therefore, organisational goals should be established for each of the OP dimensions based on the organisation's needs.

Equally important, Abualfaraa, et al. (2020) stated that the rapidly changing and highly competitive market has pressurised companies to adopt sustainable practices. These practices should assist the achievement of organisations' performance. This will only be feasible when considering the sustainability of organisations.

In the following section, the background information on sustainability achievement is debated.

1.2.2 Sustainability achievement

The world has experienced global challenges and several calamitous environmental disasters, such as the toxic gas leak from a chemical plant at Bhopal in India; the Chernobyl catastrophe; the hole in the polar ozone layer; climate change, land degradation, migration, contaminated leakages from chemical dumps; mounting concerns regarding biochemical pollution, as well as conflict over natural resources in the forestry and fishing industries (Mensah, 2019; Nhamo, et al., 2019). It is obvious that these disasters were leaning toward environmental problems and affected people's lives. Humans are fundamental to world economic activities and central to the worldwide economy. The people affected by such natural tragedies were undoubtedly affected, as well as their livelihood (economy) and other related aspects of life.

The United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) introduced the notion of SD as the prerequisite for sustainability after world leaders highlighted these tragedies (Groenewald & Powell, 2016) in the 1987 Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) entitled "Our Common Future" (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018; Cherroun & Cherroun, 2022). SD has become a dominant concept and the broad multi-focal agenda for nowadays (Veselovská; 2017). Initially, SD seemed to concentrate on the environmental aspect and related impacts. The environment is not the only aspect that can have an impact on an organisation but social, cultural, and economic aspects also play a significant role.

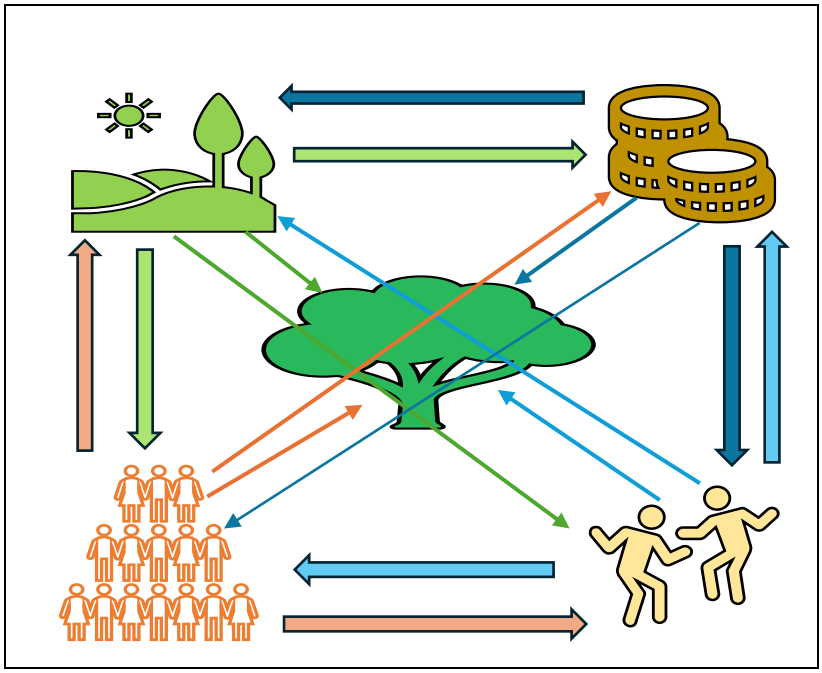
In line with the above, the impact of climate change and global warming on organisations worldwide are seen as the crucial upshot of sustainable development (SD) (Niehaus, et al., 2018). Similarly, the negative influences of climate change on the environment, societies, and economies are of great importance when achieving SD (Mårtensson & Westerberg, 2016; Kitsikopoulos, et al., 2018). Indeed, ecology can impact the environment, however, societies, economies and culture play a significant role in organisations.

It is assumed that similarly, the economy can affect cultures, societies, and environments. In the same way, cultures, economies, and environments can be impacted by social deficiencies, and likewise, cultures have the possibility of impacting the environment, economies, and societies. To explain, organisations were not founded and do not operate based only on the environment but also on its people's actions and behaviours, as well as returns and profits. Organisations cannot be affected only by negative environmental impacts but also by undesirable social and financial impacts caused by people's behaviours and economic deficiencies.

Furthermore, the two concepts of sustainability and SD have not been fully considered by national and international organisations (Chofreh & Goni, 2017). This might require the integration of these concepts into worldwide and countrywide organisations. Similarly, establishing consecutive steps for sustainability integration into organisations might be very supportive of the recognition and acceptance of sustainability and sustainable development. In addition, knowing the elements that shape sustainability is also required. The following section discusses the perspectives of sustainability.

Sustainability can be viewed from both the internal and external perspectives by companies (Bulter, et al., 2011). For this reason, it is a multi-layered phenomenon (Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2013; Nhamo, et al., 2019), and multi-dimensional indicators are desirable in sustainability (Nowduri, 2012). This multiplicity nature has been attributed to sustainability by viewing the various dimensions as exhibited in Figure 1.2 below:

Figure 1.2: Sustainability dimensions' framework



Source: Author's own

Figure 1.2 illustrates a sustainability framework integrating its four respective dimensions, principally viewed as its main components or facets and their interrelationships.

The green tree icon in Figure 1.2 symbolises interchangeable ***sustainability or sustainable development (SD)*** (Bradford, et al., 2017; Chofreh & Goni, 2017). While the green icon denotes ***environmental sustainability (ES)*** (Souza, et al., 2019; Morseletto, 2022).

The icon of brown coins represents ***economic sustainability (Eco.S)*** (González-Santa-Cruz, et al., 2020). The pink community icon characterises ***social sustainability (SS)*** (Hsu, et al., 2018; Spraul & Thaler, 2020). Nonetheless, the icon of the orange dancers signifies ***cultural sustainability (CS)*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019; Grigorescu, et al., 2020; Maziliauske, 2024). The above Figure 1.2 is a comprehensive representation of sustainability by using arrows to demonstrate the existing links between the components associated with sustainability. These relationships are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

It is said that sustainability resembles a three-legged stool, encompassing three dimensions (Veselovská, 2017; Alcívar, et al., 2020) recognised as the traditional aspects of corporate

sustainability (Lee & Saen, 2012) from 1980 to today (Moldan, et al., 2012). This concept is commonly referred to as the "triple bottom line" (TBL), Gachie, 2019; Inwood & Dale, 2019; Fonseca, et al., 2022) or the ***triple bottommost line*** (Bradford, et al., 2017).also known as the 3 Ps, which represent the planet, people, and profit, (Elkington, 1997; Chaka, 2018), corresponding to environmental, social, and economic lines (Hansmann, et al.t, 2012; Alhaddi, 2015), or perspectives(Gachie, 2019). These are widely acknowledged as the three pillars (Rosen, 2018), of responsible economic, ecological, and social practices (Bulter, et.al., 2011). However, the coexistence of these three dimensions challenges the implementation of sustainability initiatives (Ekiugbo & Papanagnou, 2017).

Contrary to the above, sustainability does not only have three dimensions but rather ***four pillars*** (Swanson & DeVereaux, 2017) with the fourth known as cultural sustainability (Soini & Birkeland, 2014) equally important than the three pillars (Loach, et al., 2017) with equal concerns (Pop et al., 2019). There are added to the other sustainability dimensions for multiple motives (Mannan, et al., 2016), such as: safeguarding and understanding the diversity worth through the manifestation of communities' 'identity and traditions' expanding across generations (Pop, et al., 2019). This is the reason why corporate identity, economic, social, and environmental were sustainability perspectives in a study by Alcívar, et al. (2020). Corporate identity is likened to corporate culture which seems to be related to cultural sustainability. Considering these associations, it might be stated that there is no sustainability without the four dimensions as presented in Figure 1.2.

Furthermore, sustainability is a voluntary activity for companies (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014; Gachie, 2015; 2019) but for Shaw (2019), environmental and social sustainability can no longer be considered as voluntary for companies. An official code of conduct relative to sustainability use and non-use should be established to avoid such contradictions, given the importance of sustainability globally. Such a code could be helpful to organisations' users of sustainability. A code of conduct should preferably provide sanctions for non-compliance to sustainability rules.

In keeping with the above, companies should consider sustainability as a necessity and a compulsory goal to attain. In addition, the purpose of sustainability dimensions is to achieve an effective balance between economic prosperity, ecological safety, and societal fairness (Muñoz-Torres et al., 2018). The objective of the United Nations was the establishment of a

sustainable development concept to achieve a set of applicable goals by balancing the three SD dimensions, namely environmental, social, and economic (Brundtland, 1987; Kuwornu, 2017; Fonseca, et al., 2022). However, it is difficult to clearly define the boundaries between the three dimensions in any organisation, since they depend on the business context (Nowduri, 2012). Nevertheless, the achievement of sustainability should include the four basic dimensions since cultural aspects have become part of sustainability pillars.

When considering organisations 'sustainability goals, it is ensured that these are aligned with the economic, environmental, social, and cultural aspects of the organisation and its surroundings. However, if the sustainability goals are not applicable and implemented in the context of the OP of companies, they might not be achieved. The following section discusses the implementation of sustainability in OP.

1.2.3 Sustainability implementation in organisational performance (OP)

Sustainability needs to be implemented by organisations, since it facilitates the achievement of higher operational performance in SMEs (Cantele & Cassia, 2020; Broccardo, et al., 2023; Ortiz-Martínez, et al., 2023; Alodat, et al., 2024). Organisations might not experience success if financial and non-financial performance is not reviewed. In addition, organisations should consider the environmental, cultural, social, and economic dimensions when implementing sustainability, leading to the realisation of financial, operational, market and growth enhancement.

Sustainability has been implemented in numerous ways. For instance, the businesses and government agendas and functioning strategies progressively involve sustainability activities (Rosen, 2018) which need to be enabled, not only by sustainable initiatives (Hamann, et al., 2017), but by combining sustainable initiatives with strategies (Enticott & Walker, 2008), and reporting sustainability initiatives (Thomas & Lamm, 2012). Organisations should consider appropriate processes and methods that will allow the implementation of sustainability in its performance. Before that, companies need to identify the environmental, economic, cultural and social aspects of the business that will support its performance. It should be ensured that sustainability is implemented at the financial, operational, market and growth performance level. In addition, each initiative and strategy should fit into each performance dimension.

Sustainable strategies are emphasised (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014) and encompass, for example strategic fit (Clifford-Defee, 2009), sustainable actions (Hamann, et al., 2017), sustainable drivers (Niehaus, et al., 2018) and adaptability (Samad, et al., 2017) empowering sustainability. This might require top management with strong capabilities and flexibility to make changes for sustainability to be adopted in its performance.

Besides the above, sustainable practices (Mura, et al., 2018; Dey, et al., 2020), and their implementation have pressurised organisations with the pressure caused by the pace of change and increased market competition (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020). However, in this section, no discussion mentions steps or provides ways of implementing sustainability and avoids complicating this in any size organisation. Therefore, it remains a necessity to decide on the steps for sustainability implementation.

Furthermore, many difficulties and challenges associated with implementing sustainability are often obscured by its simple definition (Shrivastava & Berger, 2010). It is, therefore, essential to describe the successive steps for sustainability implementation. It might be assumed that the best approach to implementing sustainability is its incorporation into the organisations' systems. The overview of the incorporation of sustainability into OP is provided below.

1.2.4 Sustainability integration in organisational performance (OP)

Several studies including Muñoz-Torres, et al. (2018), Gachie (2019), Le Roux and Pretorius (2019), Fonseca, et al. (2022) debated sustainability integration into organisations. Sustainability integration requires companies to develop strategies (Fonseca, et al., 2022) to incorporate issues related to sustainability anxieties (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2015), such as the amalgamation of ecological and societal concerns into corporate operations (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019). However, the integration of economic concerns in profit maximisation is more important than integrating social and environmental concerns (Ullah, et al., 2024).

The consideration of a sustainability concept involves a firm's capability to incorporate eco-friendly, social, and economic opportunities into its strategies (Mazur, 2017). Similarly, sustainability integration considers embracing and incorporating environmental, social, economic, and governance factors into the organisations' operations while considering the

eventual organisational and societal consequences (Groenewald & Powell, 2016). Besides, incorporating environmental and social practices in SMEs was purposeful (Johnson, 2017).

The above discussion demonstrates that when integrating the three sustainability dimensions, none should be undermined or prioritised over others (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018). Granted, cultural sustainability should also be considered during the integration process. Thus, four sustainability dimensions and their concerns should be integrated into organisations' operations, strategies, valuation guidance, projects, the development of strategic framework initiatives and other aspects of the organisation.

Sustainability incorporation into business is perceived as crucial for worldwide operating firms (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019). For this reason, it should be done correctly. However, sustainability integration steps into OP remain unknown. Hence, establishing steps to be followed for sustainability integration into organisations would permit the effectiveness of such an activity. Demonstrating sustainability integration into the inclusive OP of organisations is required.

Presently, there is a requirement, insistence, and legitimacy for sustainability amalgamation into an organisation (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019). Ridsdale and Noble (2016), scrutinised methods to incorporate sustainability and the development of valuation guidance, projects, strategic frameworks initiatives and levels. Organisations should integrate sustainability concepts into their projects given the positive impact and shared improvements because of the limited dependent resources, the inadequacy and longstanding consequences (Gachie, 2019). In this case, an organisation should integrate sustainability gradually into its performance. Hence, companies should set priorities for the areas of the business aspects that require sustainability the most. The other areas of the business might be attended to later on.

Furthermore, the integration of various stakeholders' desires and expectations, such as the inter-generational perspective of TBL, life cycle thinking, TBL initiatives, sustainability principles, as well as risk assessment processes (Muñoz-Torres, et al. 2018) should be considered by companies. Moreover, environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability might be integrated for sustainable and balanced organisational actions. In addition to this, the next section focuses on the sustainability balance in OP.

1.2.5 Sustainability balance in organisational performance (OP)

Abualfaraa, et al. (2020) stated that the current rapidly changing and highly competitive market has pressurised organisations to adopt sustainable practices by maintaining a healthy balance between economic, environmental, and social performance, which is not an easy task. Of course, to implement sustainable practices, the notion of sustainability should be integrated into the market perspective of the organisation. It should also be known that the market is not the sole dimension of OP. Therefore, sustainable practices need to be implemented in financial, operational and growth dimensions of company performance, which may require incorporating sustainability concepts into financial, operational and growth dimensions of OP in organisations. A successful integration requires following guidelines.

Several studies suggested the equilibrium of social, environmental, and monetary dimensions of sustainability (Henry, et al., 2019; Jalila & Komathy, 2019; Fonseca, et al., 2022). The requirement of SD at an organisational level (Henry, et al., 2019) is to balance social and environmental aspects for driving ecological and social performances (Jalila & Komathy, 2019). This would be an attempt to achieve economic prosperity, ecological safety and societal impartiality (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018), balancing change (Gachie, 2019), while matching dissimilar and challenging requirements against the limitations of environment, social and economic consciousness faced by people (Nhamo, et al., 2019). Bearing in mind the three pillars is a crucial condition for achieving social welfare and economic development of nations (Gachie, 2019), balancing environmental, social, and economic measurements (Jalila & Komathy, 2019), matching population growth and meeting societal needs (Brown, et al., 1987; Niehaus, et al., 2018).

However, this might indicate that the cultural aspect of sustainability seems to be neglected by previous studies when establishing the equilibrium between the sustainability pillars. Hence sustainability cannot be balanced as long as one of its dimensions is missing. This needs the attention of managers and scholars.

The purpose of sustainability includes lasting environmental and economic stability (Nhamo, et al., 2019), health and environment equilibrium for a habitable and attractive entrepreneurial and business achievement in the modern era (Nowduri, 2012). Further inclusions are ecological, financial and human capital steadiness for the satisfaction of the global

stakeholders' requests (Alcívar, et al., 2020); the equilibrium of the natural environment, financial achievement that encounters healthy and desired living standards, as well as social well-being (Niehaus, et al., 2018). In addition, guaranteeing longstanding sustainability (Fonseca, et al., 2022) through the implementation of sustainable practices (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020), such as the key driver of financial performance of businesses and a common practice for modern businesses (Jalila & Komathy, 2019).

The above discussion demonstrates that sustainability balance focuses on the environmental, economic, and social dimensions only, while the fourth pillar, known as the cultural perspective, seems to be neglected and ignored. Given its importance in companies, the sustainability equilibrium should be established among the four dimensions, namely economic, environmental, societal, and cultural sustainability. Indeed, that could be a perfect way of integrating and implementing sustainability. The overview of the context of the study is provided in the following section.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This section provides information about the context of the study in the following concepts: South Africa, SA and OP, SA and sustainability, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), SMEs' performance, SMEs' sustainability, SA SMEs' performance, and SA SMEs sustainability. The following section presents an overview of South Africa (SA).

1.3.1 South Africa

According to de Villiers-Scheepers, et al. (2017), South Africa is a country with multiple cultures. There are 12 official languages in SA of which two are Western languages and nine African languages, and sign language. In SA, immigrants from and descendants of India and South-East Asia are Indians, those of African descent are black, of European descent are white, and the coloured people are originally from mixed ethnic origins (Statistics South Africa, 2012). This justifies the diversity of cultures in SA.

South Africa is constantly threatened by issues of political uncertainty, student protests and high crime (Farrington, 2017). The author added that electricity deficiencies, possible

downgrade to junk status, labour and high joblessness and poor service delivery, as well as drought are turbulences faced by the country. In addition, South Africa, like other developing nations, is impacted by increasing inflation, low commodity prices and a volatile exchange rate. Furthermore, there is a low consumer and business self-assurance and incessant restrained economic development (Farrington, 2017). It has the immensity of Africa (Ayandibu, et al., 2019) and is classified as one of the developing countries in Africa. It economically leads the continent (Niehaus, et al., 2018) and is one of Africa's largest institutional investment markets (Johnson, et al., 2019).

The above discussions demonstrate that SA suffers from economic and social problems. In addition, there are environmental issues, such as floods, loadshedding, deterioration of some areas, buildings, roads, and tribe, race, and cultural problems. Those kinds of problems affect people, homes, government, institutions and organisations. Those problems need to be addressed to be solved in general and particularly for organisations running a business given that its performance is affected by those kinds of issues. The next section discuss OP in SA.

1.3.2 South African organisational performance

Organisations are immense challenges in South Africa (SA) (Terblanche, et al., 2019). Novelties have been adopted by SMEs for overall industry performance and competitive enhancements (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020). As an analogy, the attention of South African SMEs has progressively been paid to healthier OP (Mupani, 2016). However, not only has the apprehension of deprived SMEs' performance increased (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015) but SMEs have failed to reach a superior performance (Hanifah, et al., 2019). Consequently, poor performance might delay and prevent South African SMEs from growing and improving. Therefore, the factors impeding the good performance of SMEs in SA need potential remediation.

Furthermore, leadership implications in the OP of SMEs have been a cause for alarm when developing policies (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). This requires the understanding of the influence of organisational leadership on the OP by South African SMEs (Rahim, et al., 2015; Sawaean & Ali, 2020). Equally important, the influence of employees on OP must be understood. Sustainability in the context of SA is discussed below.

1.3.3 South African sustainability

The notion of sustainable development has been extensively acknowledged in South Africa (Groenewald & Powell, 2016). There is a restricted expansion of sustainability in SA (Kitsikopoulos, et al., 2018). Sustainability in South Africa (SA) is not very prevalent (Kitsikopoulos, et al., 2018), therefore, requiring a design that demonstrates how sustainability could be developed in the country.

Moreover, sustainability in SA focuses mainly on its reporting ever since sustainability reporting (SR) gained significant attention among global organisations (Chaka, 2018) and was accepted by contemporary organisations as a communal practice (Jalila & Komathy, 2019), as indicated in several studies (Bradford, & et al., 2017; Niehaus, et al., 2018). This has been aligned with the "principles of King II report" (Chaka, 2018) and complies with the King III corporate governance code and the annual integrated report (Niehaus, et al., 2018) officially adopted by organisations functioning on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) (Niehaus, et al., 2018).

Considering the above discussions, sustainability must first be incorporated into organisations for their performance, then implemented and evaluated before it is reported. Besides the reporting framework, there is no other official framework enabling the implementation of sustainability for the OP of businesses. This calls for a practice of implementing sustainability in SA. The next section debates SMEs.

1.3.4 Small and medium enterprises

Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) contribute to the nation's development (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). The importance of SMEs has been acknowledged by numerous emerging countries, such as Kenya and Nigeria (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020). The definition of SMEs varies across national statistical systems (Yu & Bell, 2007) and are defined by criterion formulae (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). The definition of an SME is categorised by the requirements, such as the number of employees, annual turnover, and annual balance sheet (total assets) (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). These authors claimed that meeting these requirements gives an organisation the opportunity of being a SME. This indicates that human and financial capital

are the core of SMEs. However, it is well known that SMEs suffer from shortages of these two resources. This requires owners to seek ways to overcome such constraints.

According to Mgeni and Nayak (2015), SMEs are distinguished from other organisations by size and capital investment criteria. Thus, in the Chinese context, SMEs are organisations with fewer than 2000 personnel, a turnover lower than 300 million RMB (i.e. 28.2 million Euros or 19.2 million GBP) or total assets less than 400 million RMB (i.e., 37.6 million Euros or 25.6 million GBP) (Yu & Bell, 2007). There tends to be a greater number of employees in SMEs in China than elsewhere because of the large Chinese population and the labour-intensive characteristics of the SME sector (Yu & Bell, 2007). SMEs employ less than 250 people (Shahedul-Quader, et al., 2016), for instance, Tanzanian micro-enterprises employ 1 to 4 personnel, while SMEs have 5 to 49 employees; the medium enterprises have 49 to 99 employees, with large organisations employing 100 or more employees (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). However, SMEs are well known for hardly retaining employees. This can be an obstacle for its performance and development. Hence, measures should be taken to minimise dismissals and maximising retention of workers in SMEs.

SMEs are economically powerful (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019) and are the mainstay of all economies (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019). In addition, they are the engine of the economy in the developing world (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009) and global economies are crucially sustained by SMEs (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). SMEs are the driving force of economic development (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020). Policies and auxiliary measures have been developed by national governments to facilitate economic growth (Dey, et al., 2019). However, due to the unpredictable business environment, among other problems, SMEs are not considered the economy's backbone in most emerging countries, such as Nigeria (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019).

Given the importance of SMEs in a country's economy, it requires each country's government to encourage beginners in business and regular entrepreneurs to create small enterprises. This will allow the multiplicity and diversity of business for the development of people and the country. SMEs and OP are the focus of the next section.

1.3.5 Small and medium enterprises and organisational performance

SMEs strive to develop their organisational practices (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020) to compete within a volatile business environment. In this regard, innovative activities have been undertaken to enhance performance in SMEs (Olughor, 2015). However, understanding OP remains problematic to SMEs (Shahedul-Quader, et al., 2016), therefore, there is a need to address the numerous SME challenges to enhance performance and maintain lasting success (Sawaean & Ali, 2020). Equally, there is a need to understand the influence of entrepreneurial leadership on OP (Sawaean & Ali, 2020). Similarly, SMEs require lively employee engagement through team building to improve their performance (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015). However, employee commitment remains among the serious problems of SMEs. For its feasibility, workers' awareness, incentive schemes and good entrepreneurial behaviour might help. In the next section, an outline of SMEs' sustainability is discussed.

1.3.6 Small and medium enterprises' sustainability

According to Muñoz-Pascual et al. (2019), SMEs contribute significantly to the sustainable growth of a country. Similarly, SMEs play a role in the economic progress, sustainability, and industrial expansion of a country (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019). Accordingly, management considerations and investments are increasingly devoted to sustainability (Grigorescu, et al., 2020) because the expansion routes to sustainable innovation in SMEs are a vital element of global organisations and society (Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2019). Therefore, encouraging grassroots economic development and impartial sustainable expansion is the essential role of SMEs (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020). Hence, SMEs need to be well equipped with sufficient financial and human resources to continue contributing to the expansion of sustainability.

However, organisations face numerous problems when applying sustainable practices (Pizarro, 2016) and moving towards social sustainability (Abbasi, 2017) and the achievement of a balance between the ecological, economic, and social aspects of sustainability (Sulaeman, et al., 2018). Moreover, although large organisations have the financial, knowledge and technological resources to regulate and drive their business to become more ecologically sustainable, SMEs may not have this capacity (Bakos, et al., 2019). In addition, the widespread lack of social sustainability is an issue among SMEs (Lee, et al., 2019). Further transparency and responsibility have also been requested by SME stakeholders in terms of future

sustainability initiatives (Bakos, et al., 2019). Therefore, sustainability should be incorporated into the overall SME performance system. Furthermore, it is essential to improve existing sustainability practices in SMEs by considering the most important missing elements. Also, it is important that SMEs promote financial, social, and environmental sustainability. The subsequent section discusses SMEs from a South African perspective.

1.3.7 South African small and medium enterprises

SMEs are the mainstream of businesses in South Africa (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019). South African SMEs hire 50 to 200 employees, contributing almost 40% of all economic activity. Their total turnover is R39 million with a total asset value of R6 million, depending on the industry (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019). Considering this, South African SMEs have a noteworthy position in the economy (Oseifuah & Manda, 2017). The reason why countless small companies exist in SA.

The advancement of SMEs has been the priority of the South African government (Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), 2015; Khoza, et al., 2017). The Department of Trade and Industry administers features relating to the Companies Act 71 of 2008 and the Close Corporations Act 69 of 1984 (Van Wyk & Boraine, 2017).). The Department of Trade and Industry incorporates the National Small Enterprise Act 102 of 1996 and the Co-operatives Act 14 of 2005 and is accountable for the development of SME and micro-enterprise practices (Van Wyk & Boraine, 2017). The responsibility for business procedures is shared by the Departments of Justice and Constitutional Development, according to the organisation type (Van Wyk & Boraine, 2017).

In addition, 91% of formal business entities in SA are SMEs (Oseifuah & Manda, 2017). Like any other emerging economy, the South African SME sector is the driver of the national economy (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019), since it contributes to economic growth (Oseifuah & Manda, 2017), about 61% to employment (Oseifuah & Manda, 2017) and provides 80% of new job opportunities (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). This is the question of the high unemployment rate of approximately 28% in the first quarter of 2019, as well as the achievement of social security (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Moreover, it economically empowers previously marginalised groups by reducing the gap between the rich and poor (Mamman, et al., 2015). However, the social security and gap between rich and poor is still increasing in SA. Therefore, greater effort should be made for SMEs to grow to employ young

people; this might help to reduce the issue of security. In addition, the government needs to support SME growth, which will secure jobs and reduce the existing gap between the rich and poor.

SMEs also promote the modernisation of services and products (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019). SMEs generate 35% of the gross domestic product (GDP) by contributing 52% to 57% (Oseifuah & Manda, 2017). SMEs contribute to 40% of all economic activity (Small Enterprises Development Agency, 2016), 55% of the workforce in the private sector, as well as 43% of the overall earnings and remunerations (Groepe, 2015). Furthermore, South African SMEs encourage business competition and enhance worker productivity and incentives (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019). However, the subsistence of SMEs poses a risk for the development and success of SA (Small Enterprises Development Agency, 2016). Such situations need to be addressed until the problem is solved. The next section outlines OP in the context of SA SMEs.

1.3.8 South African small and medium enterprises organisational performance

Organisations face immense challenges in South Africa (SA) (Terblanche, et al., 2018b). Consequently, new ideas have been promoted by SMEs to enhance the performance and competitiveness of the overall industry (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020). Furthermore, the focus of South African SMEs has been increasingly on good OP (Mupani, 2016). However, not only has the performance of deprived SMEs steadily declined (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015), but SMEs have also failed to achieve such superior performance (Hanifah, et al., 2019). Consequently, poor performance may delay and prevent South African SMEs from growing and improving. This situation might have a negative impact on the economic growth of the country. Therefore, factors impeding the good performance of SMEs in SA need to be addressed to find possible solutions.

Moreover, the implications of leadership for the OP of SMEs also impact policymaking (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). This requires an understanding of the organisational leadership's influence on the OP of South African SMEs (Sawaean & Ali, 2020). It is equally important to understand the influence of employees on OP. In addition to this, the section below discusses sustainability in SA SMEs.

1.3.9 South African small and medium enterprise sustainability

According to Naicker, et al. (2017), SMMEs' sustainability rates are the worst in the world. Evidence from Blose and Okeke-Uzodike's (2020) study has shown the role of SMMEs in advancing inclusive growth and development in South Africa. The country's National Development Plan highlights the importance of SMMEs to job creation, innovation, and competitiveness, and achieving Vision 2030 to create 90% new jobs. The successful entry and growth of these enterprises may create a sustainable mechanism for alleviating poverty and unemployment. In line with Section 1.2 and Section 1.3, the research problems are introduced in the next section.

1.3.10 Introduction of sustainability in the context of organisational performance in SA

According to Mabai and Hove (2020), factors affecting performance are nowadays the concern of companies. Indeed, South African organisations face environmental, economic, social, cultural and other problems. For instance, the civil unrest in KwaZulu Natal (Khoza, et al., 2022), the outbreak and lockdown related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Landa, et al., 2021, Khoza, et al., 2022), human and economic losses caused by extreme rainfall resulting in coastal flooding in urban areas of the Western Cape province of South Africa (Dube, et al., 2022), which might obstruct the performance of organisations, such as SMEs.

Furthermore, the development of township tourism in Inanda in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) was affected by tornadoes (Bopape, et al., 2022), opportunities, such as SME growth and being sustainable for meeting the society and government 's expectations have been impeded by challenges (Khoza, et al., 2022), such as those mentioned above. To emphasise, raw material shortages, the reduction of production, loss of production time, drastic drop in sales, losing customers, downsizing employee numbers, lack of access-to-access purchase orders, lack of access to short-term funding, and the lack of available relief support schemes (Khoza, et al., 2022), can easily affect the achievement of their financial and non-financial performance.

In keeping with the above, the economic, social, and political challenges faced by South Africa since 1994 require the adoption of innovative approaches by companies' leaders (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2012). Given its capability in identifying, addressing and solving the

environmental, social, economic, cultural and other problems associated with OP, sustainability may be suggested as a novel approach to be adopted and implemented to overcome these problems and ensure the achievement of both sustainable financial and non-financial performance of organisations in general and particularly organisations operating in SA, such as SMEs.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

SMEs face difficulties to achieve its OP since factors that can enable such achievement are unknown. Most of SA SMEs do not flourish after many years of being in existence. Although they are still running as a business, they do not grow financially, operationally or in terms of marketwise. There are factors (Ombongi & Long, 2018) including internal and external aspects (Seo & Lee, 2019) that influence OP. However, Chinyamurindi and Gwena (2018) suggest that as SMEs are growing it is necessary to focus on factors influencing the performance of companies in SA. This statement might indicate that those internal and external aspects mentioned by Seo and Lee (2019) seem not to be described and unknown at this point. This requires the categorisation of all the forms of factors enabling the achievement of OP in SMEs and SA SMEs.

Similarly to OP, SMEs fail to maintain sustainability due to the unawareness of factors that can lead to sustainability achievement. In SA some SME owners or managers talk about sustainability without even considering it in practice. By doing so, they cannot achieve it. According to Rosen (2018), the imperative objective of a society is to attain sustainability, also there should be necessary components enabling the achievement of a sustainable process and scheme. Although natural, social, economic and cultural environments should be part of the actions taken to achieve the sustainable development goals (Pop, et al., 2019), however, the negative impact of these activities is not well measured, potentially contributing to the failure of achieving sustainability. In addition, factors that can enable the achievement of sustainability in general, and these environmental, economic, social, and cultural activities in particular are unknown. Therefore, it requires an investigation into these components to achieve sustainability.

SMEs encounter challenges and difficulties that hinder the achievement of their performance. Most of SA SMEs shutdown easily and disappear shortly after their creation. Some disappear

without even flourishing, not even initially. For instance, SMEs and SMMEs' self-sustenance (Akhtar, et al., 2015), continual problems (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020) and challenges (Hanifah, et al., 2019) in general, particularly in SA SMEs (Mafundu & Mafini, 2019). Certain factors (Nikolić, et al., 2019), such as external ones (Enticott & Walker, 2008) are considered harmful (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020 which not only obstruct development and growth (Oseifuah & Manda, 2017), but also lead to the failure of SMEs' achieving better performance (Hanifah, et al., 2019) including those operating in SA (Mtshali & Chinyamurindi, 2021). These complications obstructing SMEs might lead to the failure and shutting down of these organisations if not addressed. To overcome these problems, the mentioned factors need to be identified and categorised.

The achievement of sustainability in SMEs is subjected to challenges and complications. SA SMEs face many sustainability problems including a shortage of finance, an unclean business environment, poor customer service and cultural tensions. This indicates that sustainability as a notion is not considered by SME owners. Similar to the above discussions, SMEs are questioned, conflicted and challenged with self-sustainability (Akhtar, et al., 2015) and sustainable development issues (Veselovská, 2017), such as pursuing sustainability (Westman, et al., 2019), social and environmental necessities (Jorgensen & Knudsen, 2006), engaging with the uptake of sustainability practices (Lawrence, et al., 2006), and the attainment of sustainability (Rosen, 2018). In addition, Niehaus, et al. (2018) affirmed that the application of sustainability has been delayed by the existing driving forces, which are probably in- or outside the organisation (Van Marrewijk & Werre 2003). These current driving forces could be internal or external to the company. They are called forces because they can impact sustainability achievement. However, these forces are still unknown. It would be difficult for SMEs to address unknown factors. Therefore, the identification of those internal and external forces can assist in solving sustainability problems in SMEs.

It is difficult to implement sustainability in SMEs. Implementing sustainability or sustainable development in today's world is crucial (Veselovská, 2017). Yet, generally organisations are challenged by the implementation of sustainability (Shaw, 2019), and particularly SMEs (Boiral & Henri, 2017). The challenges of sustainability implementation involve, for instance, the application of sustainable practices (Pizarro, 2016) and a successful implementation process (Epstein, et al., 2010), which might necessitate the setting and description of consecutive phases for sustainability implementation in this sector.

The struggle of implementing sustainability in SMEs is linked to the difficulties to integrate sustainability into the company's performance. The task of incorporating sustainability into the organisational structure and practices remains difficult (Ridsdale & Noble, 2016), and likewise, there is no single-best process or criteria for assessing the effectiveness of sustainability integration (Pope et al., 2019). In SA for instance, much needs to be done to reach the point of incorporating sustainability into a business (Mammatt, 2013). Comprehensive steps might be needed for the integration of sustainability into the OP of SMEs. In addition, the lack of integrating sustainability into business performance can obstruct the balance of sustainability usage in SMEs, such as implementation, evaluation and balance.

The establishment of equilibrium between sustainability pillars in the OP of any company is difficult. Alcívar, et al. (2020) suggested establishing an equilibrium between monetary, societal, and ecological facets of the organisation. However, Kosasih, et al. (2023) acknowledged the lack of experimental empirical studies involving all three aspects of the triple bottom line (3BL) in SMEs' performance. In the same way, SMEs face numerous problems and challenges in achieving a balance between the ecological, economic, and social aspects of sustainability (Sulaeman, et al., 2018). Indeed, this was also observed in SA SMEs (Journeault, et al., 2021), as well as in cultural aspects. Consequently, there is a requirement for establishing approaches for the assimilation of sustainability components into the organisational performance of SMEs, including in SA, with the potential to simplify their balance of sustainability components. The next section formulates the purpose of the study.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore existing literature by using a critical and integrative review of sustainability and the OP of SMEs in general and particularly South African SMEs. Referring to the stated research problems, the objectives of the study are provided in the next section.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were formulated by considering the difficulties discussed in the problem statement and were achieved by reviewing the literature:

1. To scrutinise the enablers that facilitate the attainment of sustainability and OP of SA SMEs.
2. To inspect the challenges that impede the attainment of OP and sustainability of SA SMEs.
3. To explore the phases for implementing sustainability in the OP of SA SMEs.
4. To study the steps for incorporating sustainability into OP of SA SMEs.
5. To investigate the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SA SMEs.

The ***first research objective*** was subdivided as follows: ***Sub-objective 1a:*** To scrutinise the enablers that facilitate the attainment of OP of South African SMEs, and ***Sub-objective 1b:*** To scrutinise the enablers that facilitate the attainment of sustainability of South African SMEs.

In the same way, the ***second research objective*** was also subdivided as follows: ***Sub-objective 2a:*** To inspect the challenges that impede the attainment of OP in South African SMEs. ***Sub-objective 2b:*** To inspect the challenges that impede the attainment of sustainability in South African SMEs.

For the context of this study, an enabler is any factor, or key success factor determining, driving, influencing sustainability and OP achievement in SMEs., or any factor that plays a positive role in the achievement of sustainability and OP of SMEs.

For the context of this study, a challenge is any factor determining, driving or influencing the non-achievement of sustainability and OP achievement in SMEs or any factor that plays a negative role in the achievement of sustainability and OP of SMEs.

Moreover, it should be noted that although SA SMEs was the context of this study, however, the integrated literature review (IRL) was not focused on SA SMEs literature only, but more broadly focused on literature based on SMEs in other geographic locations. The study specifically focused on the field of management and business or business management to identify the missing elements in the context of SA SMEs when compared to other SMEs. The intent was to expand SA SMEs literature through the proposed research agenda. The following section presents the formulated research questions based on the research objectives.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions in line with the research problems and objectives were formulated to explore the sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs through a literature review, as follows:

- **RQ1)** What are OP enablers and how do these enablers facilitate the attainment of sustainability and OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ2)** What are the challenges impeding the attainment of sustainability and OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ3)** What are the phases for implementing sustainability in SMEs in SA?
- **RQ4)** What are the steps for incorporating sustainability into the OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ5)** What are the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs in SA?

In line with the current objectives and research questions, the next section deals with the formulation of the research assumptions.

1.8 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

To explore the extent to which sustainability and OP of SMEs have been investigated before, and in line with the research problems, objectives and questions, the following are the research assumptions:

- The literature investigates enablers that facilitate the attainment of OP and sustainability in SA SMEs
- The literature deals with challenges facing the impedance of attaining OP and sustainability in SA SMEs
- The literature has research on the phases for implementing sustainability in OP of SA SMEs
- The literature is based on steps for incorporating sustainability into OP of SA SMEs
- The literature examines approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SA SMEs.

The validity of these assumptions was investigated and assessed by reviewing multiple literature sources. The rationale of this study is discussed in the next section.

1.9 RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

Findler (2021) acknowledged the potential for business schools to become a driver of vital sustainable development (SD) through the expansion of research evaluations beyond scientific performance. The author suggested business schools be supported by the assessment of the frameworks and expanding the scope from academic performance to actual inputs to SD. The next section offers the reason for choosing OP for this study.

1.9.1 Motive for choosing organisational performance (OP)

OP is the first phenomenon in this study due to its characteristic of being the principal organisational factor (Purusottama, 2020). From the preliminary reading of the literature, this study acknowledges the existence of numerous performance challenges faced by organisations, which is generally a common concern among large organisations and SMEs in particular. Performance failure might make the integration, implementation, and equilibrium of sustainability by organisations even more difficult. Therefore, OP needed to be studied in depth to not only enable the success of companies in general and SMEs in particular but also the practicality of sustainability. The reason why OP dimensions were selected is discussed below.

1.9.2 Motive for including organisational performance dimensions (OPDs)

It is important to take all the dimensions of OP into account, as the three main performance dimensions are imperative for stakeholders of an organisation (Mang, 2018). Therefore, OP cannot be captured by a sole measurement and the findings of OP studies cannot be largely based on a single dimension (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). The four dimensions of OP include financial, operational, market and growth performance and each has a particular and important role to play in the achievement of a company's goals. In addition, without each of them the achievement of the company performance will not be complete, and the company business cannot flourish. The next section provides the motive for the selection of sustainability in this study.

1.9.3 Motive for sustainability

Sustainability was selected for this study because it is essential for global organisations. It is an enabler to achieve organisational goals and long-lasting shareholder-worth (Mazur, 2015). It is also an innovation driver (Klewitz & Hansen, 2012) and the "novel standard" for contemporary businesses (Ahmad, et al., 2021). It is the requirement for modern business. In the actual world, organisations that are willing to run businesses should consider the integration and implementation of sustainability in the overall process of its operations. However, SME activities are largely and continuously unsustainable (Nwokocha & Nwankwo, 2019). This might be due to the lack of awareness about sustainability importance and / or lack of interest in sustainability. It might be difficult for organisations to run businesses and remain sustainable without considering sustainability. In short, sustainability is unconditional to all SMEs.

Sustainability concepts should concentrate on a specific discipline that need to use them (Rosen, 2018). Therefore, conducting a study on sustainability was important since it contributes to a way of addressing and solving environmental, social, and economic problems associated with organisations' activities. In the subsequent section, the motive for including the sustainability dimensions is offered.

1.9.4 Motive for including sustainability dimensions

It was important to consider all sustainability pillars in this study, given the important role played by each of them. Together the economic, environmental, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability can help a company perform to become sustainable. To illustrate, problems related to financial performance can be addressed in the light of economic sustainability. Environmental sustainability can assist to address issues of the company at the operational level. Problems associated with market and growth performance are related to social and cultural sustainability.

Rosen (2018) requires an all-inclusive and comprehensive approach to sustainability for sustainability topics. Therefore, all sustainability dimensions needed to be regarded in this study. Sustainability dimensions where key components of this study as organisational systems comprise economic, ecological, and social practices that influence performance (Dey, et al., 2019), along with cultural practices. Similarly, there is an increased focus on jointly addressing

ecological, social, and economic performance (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018), environmental, economic, and social objectives, and performance measures for all-inclusive sustainability management and valuation requirements (Varsei, et al., 2014). Cultural sustainability was added (Swanson & DeVereaux, 2017) as the fourth dimension, given that it is equal to the other three pillars (Loach et al., 2017). The reason why sustainability issues were addressed in this study is provided below.

1.9.5 Motive for addressing sustainability issues

It was important to explore sustainability issues in this study because the investigation of multifaceted factors enabling and obstructing sustainability implementation required a discussion (Cantele & Zardini, 2020), as well as the sustainability issues specific to small businesses (Jenkins, 2004). The subsequent section justifies the motive for sustainability integration in this study.

1.9.6 Motive for including sustainability integration

Sustainability integration was a focus of this study because there is a risk of business activities having undesirable influences on the environment and society. After all, organisations fail to incorporate sustainability into their processes, plans, and lasting vision (Calabrese, et al., 2019). Moreover, integrating the three sustainability dimensions would avoid the prioritisation of one dimension over the others (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018). The attainment of sustainable growth depends importantly on the incorporation of ecological, social, and economic dimensions along with a cultural dimension. The next section justifies the motive for sustainability implementation in this study.

1.9.7 Motive for including sustainability implementation

It was important to include the theme of sustainability implementation in this study since sustainability can contribute to performance in the four dimensions. The implementation of sustainability can help SMEs to reach sustainable performance and become sustainable. In addition, sustainability implementation could enhance the outcomes of SMEs' operational performance (Maletič, et al., 2019). Also, like any other organisation, SMEs are under significant pressure to adopt sustainability practices to cope with today's highly competitive

market and fast pace of change (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020). There are many benefits that SMEs can gain by implementing sustainability at all performance levels.

1.9.8 Motive for balancing sustainability dimensions

It was important to include the theme of sustainability balance to this study because a company cannot be sustainable if the four dimensions of sustainability are not equally attained. Maintaining a healthy equilibrium between the sustainability dimensions of environmental, economic, and social performance is essential for organisations to cope with today's fast-changing and highly competitive market (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020). Similarly, a holistic view and steadiness of the three sustainability components is necessary throughout its execution process (Olawumi & Chan, 2019).

Above all, balancing the execution of the three sustainability pillars is emphasised by the notion of sustainability (Rohman & Hidayat, 2019). Establishing an equilibrium between the three pillars will help simultaneously reveal the positive outcomes obtained from some dimensions and the poor outcomes attained from other dimensions (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018). The literature suggests the equilibrium between three pillars includes environmental, economic, and social sustainability; however, this study suggested the balance is between four dimensions of sustainability that include environment, economy, social and culture.

1.9.9 Motive for choosing small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs were selected for this study since it is a very important input to the local and global economy. However, they are challenged to sustain their performance (Akhtar, et al., 2015), and their growth is perpetually limited (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015). Therefore, it was necessary to address the numerous challenges faced by SMEs to enhance their performance and guarantee their lasting success (Sawaean & Ali, 2020). In addition, SMEs provided a suitable context as it was easy to understand the requirements for their advancement and expansion (Kiilu & Kithae, 2020). Thus, this study intended to provide insights into how SMEs can overcome the numerous obstacles, to not only maintain their performance but also to improve it. SMEs were chosen, given their importance in developing the economy of any country worldwide.

1.9.10 Motive for choosing the South African context

The South African context was a stimulating platform for conducting reasonable commercial and professional studies on SMEs (Coetzee, et al., 2019).

1.9.11 Motive for choosing the integrative literature review method

The integrative literature review method was selected to collect a large amount of qualitative information from the large amount of literature conducted on SMEs from various continents and countries including the African continent and South Africa, which could not be achieved using another research method. By identifying the gaps in the reviewed literature, this study offered a clear view of what has been done in SMEs but missed in the SA context and drew a research agenda to upgrade the literature on SA SMEs in the future. The next section focuses on the significance of the study.

1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study could be reading material or support for postgraduate students, scholars, and practitioners willing to conduct research on a similar topic.

The study has the potential to contribute to the literature in the following research fields:

- Management literature: by highlighting the importance of sustainability in OP.
- Business management and entrepreneurship literature: by stressing the importance of sustainability and OP in SMEs.
- Sustainability literature: by emphasising that sustainability is an enabler of OP.
- Environmental literature: by determining the impact of ecology on OP and demonstrating the need to enhance environmental sustainability perceptions in today's world.
- Social management literature: by demonstrating the necessity of boosting social sustainability notions in our current ecosphere.
- Economic literature: by showing the need to enhance economic sustainability concepts in our contemporary world.

- Cultural literature: by showing the need to enhance cultural sustainability concepts in our contemporary world.
- SME literature: by showing that sustainability is an effective tool for enhancing SMEs' performance.

Furthermore, the findings of this study will benefit potential Master's and PhD students as well as scholars. People intending to embrace academia, particularly, in the management, business, business management and entrepreneurship disciplines will also benefit from this study. Moreover, the study will profit to managers, employers and entrepreneurs. Lastly, this study will benefit the research office of the University of the Witwatersrand.

Furthermore, the details regarding the demarcation of the study are provided in the next section.

1.11. DEMARCATION AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Numerous studies demonstrate the approaches of reaching OP through successful performance measurement (Cardoni, et al., 2020; Alves & Lourenço, 2022; Blais, et al., 2023). Other literature exposes the failure of SMEs' performance due to performance measurement challenges (Pattanasak, et al., 2022; Yadav, et al., 2022; Costa, et al., 2023). Of course, this might indicate that performance measurement has been the enabling factor and challenging OP achievement in SMEs. Therefore, performance measurement was not considered in this study since it has previously been covered.

Sustainability reporting has been one of the factors enabling sustainability achievement in many forms of companies including SMEs (Girella, et al., 2019; Socoliuc, et al., 2020; Tauringana, 2021). However, SMEs struggled to attain sustainability because of the reporting challenges they faced (Kinderman, 2020; Zrnić, et al., 2020; Neri, et al., 2021). With this in mind, sustainability reporting might be considered as the enabler and at the same time the challenge of SMEs' sustainability success. Therefore, it was not counted amongst the researched factors of sustainability in this study, in terms of enablers or challenges of sustainability in SMEs.

In line with the above discussions, this study considered any factor generated from the findings of expected performance measurement and sustainability reporting. Any small, related organisations were included in the study, such as SMEs, SMMEs. MMEs and MMSEs, and other sizes were excluded.

In addition, this study considered the collection of literature published from 2017 to 2024 to ensure that the information collected regarding sustainability and OP of SA SMEs is relevant, actual and more recent. All key concepts are defined in the next section.

1.12 DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

This section provides definitions of the key concepts for this study, namely sustainability, OP and SMEs. The next section presents various definitions of OP.

1.12.1 Organisational performance

There have been critical arguments regarding the OP concept, such as the conceptual clarity problems associated with the OP definition (Heffernan & Flood, 2000), the terminological and onceptual core (Ejere & Abasilim, 2013). Organisation performance (OP) is the synonym for a firm's performance (Rajasekar & Jeyasutharsan, 2013). Business performance and OP are interchangeably used in most studies (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). OP and business performance have identical conceptualisations (Arief, et al., 2013). Due to diverse definitions provided by different studies (Mupani, 2016), the OP definition remains problematic (Lu, Lin & Tu, 2009) and a debatable subject (Mupani, 2016). Besides, in organisation surveys, OP as a concept is mostly defined in an unclear and unrefined manner (Hellstrom & Eriksson, 2013). An OP framework needs to be designed with the potential to include all factors defining the performance indicators of organisations.

There are similarities between the following concepts: organisational performance, business performance, firm performance, and company performance. These concepts have been used by various researchers (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). A review of these terms by Mgeni (2015) concluded that all of them mean the same. These concepts can be used interchangeably as supported by Okyere (2017). The following section defines sustainability.

In the context of this study, OP is the achievement of financial, operational, market and growth performance which are the core of SA SME performance. SA SMEs with a good OP system would allow not only for the identification of problems and challenges that impede the achievement of its performance, but also the setting of necessary corrective measures which would allow for the improvement of its performance. In addition, identifying factors enabling the achievement of these aspects of performance is essential to SA SMEs in sustaining better performance.

1.12.2 Sustainability

There is no universally accepted definition of sustainability (Ridsdale & Noble, 2016) although there appears to be some agreement regarding the actual definition of sustainability (Niehaus, et al., 2018), and given the vagueness of sustainability definitions (Niehaus, et al., 2018; Gachie, 2019). However, Boso, et al. (2017) acknowledged sustainability as the money quantity involved in ecological and social causes.

Sustain is the word that has generated sustainability, which means the management of the incessant being of something over a long time (Burger & Middelberg, 2018). Thus, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002); Joy & Peña (2017) recognise the capability of sustainability to meet the contemporary ecological, economic and social needs without having negative impacts on the ability of future generations to meet their needs in terms of economy, social and ecology. Sustainability is the new standard for contemporary organisations in developed nations (Ahmad, et al., 2021). Naturally, considering sustainability as a novel principle for modern organisations might motivate organisations to embrace such a notion. The definition of SMEs is provided in the subsequent section.

In the context of this study sustainability can be considered as the environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects of SME performance. It requires addressing the various problems that can obstruct the achievement of good performance of companies at the financial, operational, market and growth levels. In addition, the four aspects of sustainability need to be integrated, implemented and balanced in the overall performance dimensions of SMEs to reach sustainable SME performance. Furthermore, factors that can enable the integration, implementation and balance of environmental, social, economic and cultural needs must identified and used for the maintenance of superior and sustainable performance of SMEs.

1.12.3 Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

A universal definition of SMEs does not exist (Cherroun & Cherroun, 2022). Even though the definition of SMEs varies across national statistical systems (Yu & Bell, 2007), industry to industry (Ilori, 2015), one country to another (Ilori, 2015). Following its diverse socio-economic potential and conditions (Siam & Rahahleh, 2010). Besides size, type, assets, and revenue, employees can define SMEs (Maziriri & Mapuranga, 2017). Indeed, the term medium enterprises (MEs) refers to medium-sized-enterprises, as stated in the new tentative note (Yu & Bell, 2007). The Republic of Tanzania refers to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) as SMEs (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). These concepts are frequently used interchangeably (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015).

The definition of SME categories is based on the following requirements: the number of employees, annual turnover, and annual balance sheet (total assets) (Yu & Bell, 2007). These authors asserted that meeting these requirements gives an organisation the privilege of being an SME. According to Mgeni and Nayak (2015), SMEs are distinguished from other organisations by size and capital investment criteria.

Therefore, in the Chinese context, SMEs are organisations with fewer than 2 000 personnel, a turnover lower than 300 million RMB (i.e. 28.2 million Euros or 19.2 million GBP) or total assets less than 400 million RMB (i.e. 37.6 million Euros or 25.6 million GBP) (Yu & Bell, 2007). There is a tendency to have much larger numbers of employees in SMEs in China than elsewhere, due to the large Chinese population and the labour-intensive characteristics of the SME sector (Yu & Bell, 2007).

SMEs employ less than 250 people (Quader, et al., 2016) but in Saudi Arabia, SMEs hire a total of 5.4 million employees (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015). On the other hand, Tanzanian micro-enterprises employ 1 to 4 personnel, while their SMEs hire 5 to 49 employees, and their medium enterprises have from 49 to 99 employees, with large organisations employing 100 or more (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015).

The definition of an SME is the number of people employed by employers or owners of the business, for instance, the number of permanent workers in the organisation (Wolmarans &

Meintjes, 2015). SMEs employ various numbers, such as 150 people or fewer (Maziriri & Mapuranga, 2017), less than 50 workers on their staff and, less than 100 workers (Lotfizadeh & Shamsi, 2015;), or more than 100 employers according to Iran Statistical Center, published in 2010 (Rashidian, et al. 2014). Frequently, family members are the active but unpaid working staff of SMEs (Maziriri & Mapuranga, 2017).

Generally, SMEs are referred to as entities (Van Wyk & Rossouw, 2009), or a group of organisations with a varied size and functioning structure (Quader, et al., 2016). There are manufacturing, rural, and urban service units (Lotfizadeh & Shamsi, 2015) which are not public limited company (Modimogale & Kroeze, 2009). The international definition of SMEs (Maziriri & Mapuranga, 2017). is a formal enterprise with a yearly turnover in US dollar terms of between 10 and 1000 times the mean per capita gross national income, at the purchasing power parity of the country in which it operates (Mgeni & Nayak 2015). The outline of the study is summarised in the section below.

In the context of this study, SMEs are small companies that seek to achieve financial, operational, market and growth performance and environmental, social, economic and cultural sustainability by identifying enablers and challenges. To achieve sustainability and performance achievement, an SME need to integrate sustainability into its OP, implementing and balancing sustainability in its performance activities. SMEs should work hard to reach sustainable performance.

1.13 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter 1 focused on the introduction and background information, as well as providing an overview and clear orientation of the study.

Chapter 2 presents all the key research components for the integrative literature review (ILR), which includes the components of each of the OP dimensions, such as FP, OPP, MP, and GP. Likewise, the components of sustainability dimensions including ES, ECS, SS, and CS, which were used for data interpretation, discussions, gap identification in the literature, and recommendations for scholars and probationers to consider for future investigation. In short, the contents of this chapter establish the fundamentals for the data collection in this study.

Moreover, the appropriate theory leading to the effective integrative literature review and the theoretical foundation of the study are also discussed.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed in this study which includes the research paradigms, ontology, epistemology, research approach, research design, research choices, time horizon, research area and research method. The target population and sampling are discussed. The procedures and techniques for data gathering and data analysis are also presented. The overall data management, ethical considerations with criteria for determining the truthfulness, credibility, transferability and conformability, dependability of research findings, as well as the Wits University ethical clearance are discussed in this chapter. To finish, the dissemination and use of the results, as well as the limitations of the study are included in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the findings, data analysis and discussions. The chapter presents the collected data related to the research questions, the enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievements, sustainability integration steps, sustainability implementation phases, and sustainability balance approaches of the OP of SMES in general and SA SMEs. The data were analysed using content and thematic analyses. The analysed data were discussed in line with the key search components of the gaps in the literature of the phenomenon that were identified. A short conclusion ends the chapter.

Chapter 5 deals with knowledge building and the contributions of the study. In this chapter six valuable designs are built, such as the integrated categorical-conceptual framework, the contextual framework, the business models for successful SMEs' organisational performance, for successful SMEs' sustainability and for sustainable SMEs' performance, as well as theory building. The categorical-conceptual framework mixed multiple categories or factors and concepts generated from the reviewed literature. Furthermore, the integrated conceptual framework encompasses various codes or concepts derived from the identified categories of the reviewed literature. The contextual framework encompassed all the categories' relative concepts generated from the literature review on SA SMEs only. The contents of the constructed business model combined the components of categorical, conceptual, and contextual frameworks, as well as key research concepts or components, and the built theories and research problems are all incorporated into this chapter. In addition, the chapter discusses the methodical contributions, the practical and managerial implications, as well as the drawing of the research agenda presented in the recommendation section in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter and conclusion of the study. The recommendations, presented in the form of multiple research agendas aligned with the findings, identify gaps in the integrative literature review and the stated research problem, as outlined in this chapter. Future research areas were also mentioned.

The next chapter lists the components of the phenomena under study and the theoretical foundations of this research.

CHAPTER TWO

PHENOMENAL COMPONENTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Whittemore and Knafl (2005) suggested the clear specification of the concept of integration in the integrative review. For this reason, this chapter presents the phenomenal components and theoretical foundations applied in this study. For the context of this study, phenomenal components indicate the components of the phenomenon under study. This study is based on two phenomena, namely, sustainability and organisational performance (OP). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Section, 1.2.2, OP consists of four dimensions, namely financial, operational, market and growth performance. Similarly, in Section 1.3.2, it was mentioned that the four sustainability pillars are environmental, social, economic, and cultural.

As is well-known in research, the conceptual framework cannot be shaped before the literature review. Therefore, the phenomenal components presented in this chapter are not included in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 5 but rather the key search concepts or components. This means that these factors were searched for and revealed by reviewing the literature. In addition, the designed conceptual framework and its components generated from the integrative reviewed literature are presented and discussed in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the interpretation and identified gaps in the literature were based on these components. This allows, on the one hand, a better understanding of the topic or the phenomena under study, and on the other hand, ensures that the topic has been covered sufficiently.

The theoretical foundation was the other aspect covered in this chapter. The study adopted two theories, namely the theory of knowledge for the literature review method and contingency theory. The theory of knowledge was used as a guide for the overall process of the literature review to ensure that the method was implemented adequately, while contingency was used as the core for the development of further theories. The remainder of the chapter provides brief information about the following: OP components, sustainability components, possible links

between OP dimensions and sustainability dimensions, possible connections between sustainability dimensions and OP dimensions, the frame of the key search components, theoretical foundations that encompassed detailed information on the theory of knowledge and contingency theory, and a brief conclusion.

This study adopted the integrative literature review method. In Chapter 3, the application of this method is provided. The approach and the related concepts cannot be selected and discussed until the literature review is complete. The next section lists the components of OP.

2.2 COMPONENTS OF ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

This section discusses the dimensions of OP. The two aspects of OP are ***financial performance (FP) and non-financial performance (NFP)*** (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Khan, et al., 2019), with the nature of ***quantitative and qualitative standings*** (Qamruzzaman & Karim, 2020).) acknowledged as ***tangible and intangible performance measures*** (Vătămănescu, et al., 2019) and labelled as ***dimensions*** (Phuthi, 2016;), known as ***financial and non-financial measures*** (Issau & Soni, 2019; Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). This indicates that both FP and NFP are important for the success of an organisation. Below are other labels of the main components of OP.

The main OP components are also called ***perspectives,*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016); or ***subjective or objective scales*** (Mudjijah, et al., 2022), or ***FP and marketing performance (MP)*** (Green, et al., 2007), which characterise ***the indicators of OP measurement*** (Hussain & Hadi, 2019;) and are ***the identified core dimensions of OP*** (Rehman, et al., 2018b). ***Financial and non-financial performance (F&NFP)*** are also referred to as ***business performance variables*** (Mearns & Boshoff, 2017). ***NFP*** is also labelled as ***non-economic performance*** (Mudjijah, et al., 2022). Companies, regardless of their size, large, medium or small, need to consider the combination of monetary and non-monetary performance in their daily activities. However, most companies focus more on their financial rather than non-financial performance.

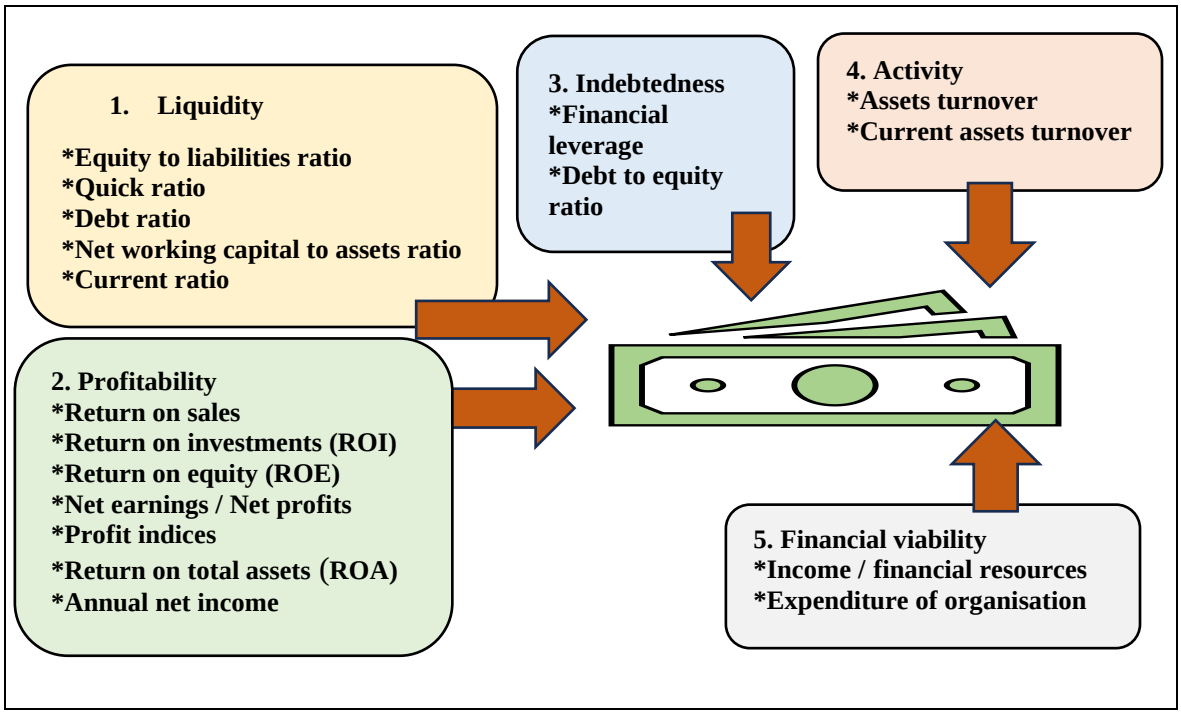
There is a need for business owners to be aware of the role that each of these categories can play in achieving their business performance and the advantages they can benefit from each of these categories of performance. In addition, it is imperative to identify and know the various

aspects that each of these performance standpoints covers. Therefore, in the following section, the components of the financial performance dimensions are listed.

2.2.1 Financial performance components

This section briefly discusses the overall view of ***FP dimension,*** which is the first perspective of OP. FP is complex due to the number of elements it encompasses. This might mislead its application and measurement, and the understanding of relevant variables. For a better understanding, Figure 2.1 (below) exhibits the overall FP components

Figure 2.1: Financial performance components frame



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.1 displays the components of FP known as ***accounting measures*** (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021) and ***performance metrics*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), which have been investigated by numerous scholars (Nyathi, et al., 2018; Oyerinde, et al., 2018; Fernando, et al., 2023), and various conclusions regarding FP were revealed.

FP is the tangible outcome of ***maximising sales, profits, rising production costs, equity contribution and cash flow*** improvements (Fernando, et al., 2023). There is a possibility of

measuring OP using ***financial ratios, net profits, revenue growth, and cost reductions*** (Lucato, et al., 2017). Likewise, the use of ***standard costs, revenue goals, profit goals, and return on investments*** (Shiu & Yu, 2010). It is also related to records of financial statements of sales growth (Issau & Soni, 2019;). Furthermore, the components of FP dimensions might be categorised into three, namely ratios, profitability, and return. The next subsection discusses the different ratios.

- **Ratios**

The *financial ratios* also called ***accounting ratios*** (Griffin & Mahon, 1997; Bayoud, et al., 2012; Goel, 2018) include ***market valuation ratios*** (Arnold, et al., 2012) or ***accounting and market based mixed ratios*** (Mulyadi & Anwar, 2012). The five financial ratios commonly used are ***liquidity ratio, activity ratio, leverage ratio, profitability ratio and market value ratio*** which were found to be key for measuring performance (Kurniati, 2019) regarding ***company performance prediction*** (Ragab & Saleh, 2022); ***financial distress forecast*** (Mariano, et al., 2021; Ragab & Saleh, 2022)., ***financial analysis*** (Nyathi, et al., 2018), and the ***effectiveness of asset usage*** (Kurniati, 2019). Profitability is discussed in the following subsection.

- **Profitability**

OP is positively affected by ***profitability or profit*** (Abugre, 2019; Teti & Montefusco, 2022; Hughes, et al., 2022), including ***cash flow*** (Le & Phan, 2017;) with ***desirable liquidity*** remaining in the company essentially by the ***required profitability*** (Hughes, et al., 2022). Various forms of returns are listed in the next sub-section.

- **Return**

Return is another ***profitability component*** which encompasses various aspects, such as ***Return on Assets (ROA)*** (Abbas, et al., 2018; Hakimah, et al., 2019; Kohont & Zajc, 2019; Ying, et al., 2021), ***Return on Equity (ROE)*** (Hussain & Hadi, 2019; Fernando, et al., 2023), ***Return on Stock (ROS)*** (Abbas, et al., 2018), ***Return on Sales*** (Abugre, 2019; Purusottama, 2020), and ***Return on Investment*** **(ROI)** (Issau & Soni, 2019). Furthermore, ***revenue*** (Oyerinde, et al., 2018), ***net income*** (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021), and ***financial expenses and earnings*** (Mariano, et al., 2021) are also variables of FP. Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986)

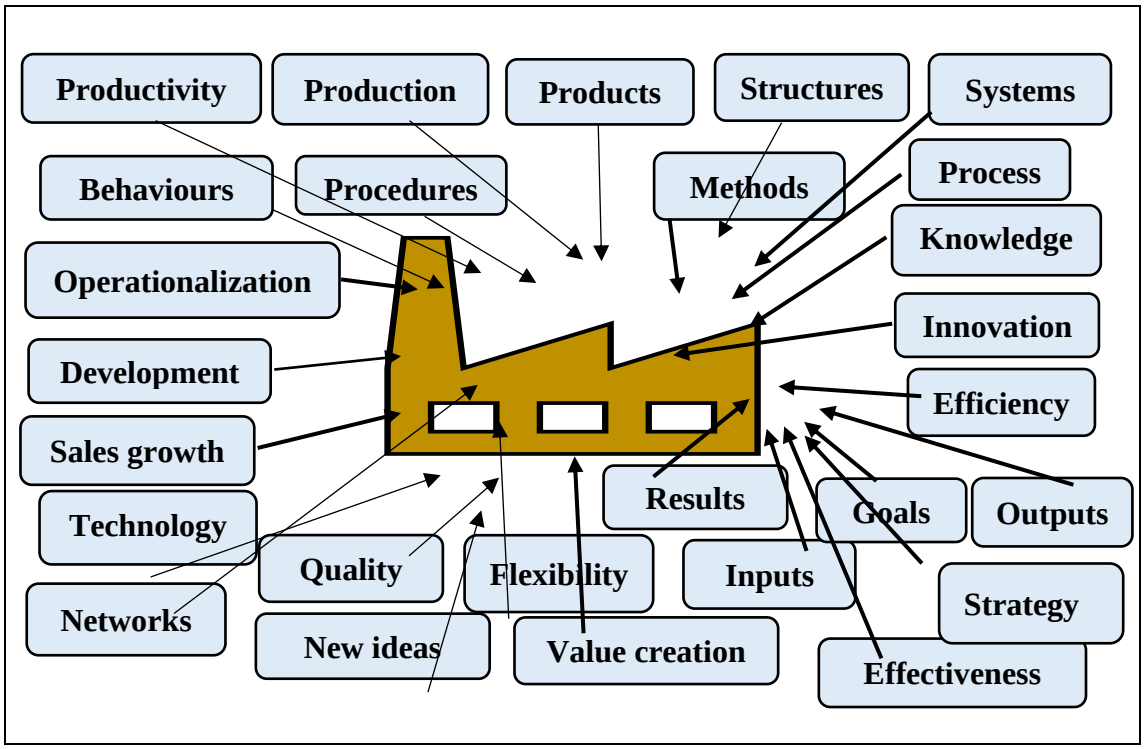
considered the components of ***financial performance as financial indicators***, which can indicate the achievement of the financial aspects of the organisation.

In addition to the above, high firm performance, and improved and efficient performers are the expectations of companies with ***high profitability*** (Margaritis & Psillaki, 2010). In the same way, investing in OP operations, investors' attractiveness, financing security, funding, and business growth are impacted by ***profitability*** (Hughes, et al., 2022), furthermore, it is important to note that ***future FP*** is effectively and dependably gauged by ***NFP*** (Chavan, 2009). Such dependability demonstrates that under normal circumstances, FP and NFP should not be disassociated when viewed for their interdependent nature. Besides the above, the components of OPP are itemised in the next section.

2.2.2 Operational performance components

This section mentions certain components of ***operational performance (OPP)*** as an important dimension of OP, as one might assume that it is the environment of business functions or operations. Although ***productivity, delivery ability, quality customer satisfaction, inventory, and costs,*** are usually measures of the performance of production operations, however, opinions are inconsistent (Qamruzzaman & Karim, 2020). Everything regarding the existence of a company is run at the operational level, specifically, firms' activities and practices as exhibited in Figure 2.2 below. Thus, all OPP can be measured in terms of the achievement of all these operative activities and practices. Figure 2.2 demonstrates the multiple aspects of OPP.

Figure 2.2: Operational performance components frame



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.2 demonstrates the components that form OPP. In this study, they were divided into five categories, namely productivity, inputs and outputs, value, innovation, and other components The below subsection itemises the elements that shape productivity.

- **Productivity**

Productivity might include ***operationalisation*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), ***process*** (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015), ***versatile and valuable processes*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2021), ***procedures*** (Phuthi, 2016), ***structures*** (Phuthi, 2016), ***systems*** (Phuthi, 2016), ***method*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2020), ***productivity*** (Maletic, et al., 2014; Wijesekara, et al., 2016), ***products*** (Phuthi, 2016), ***quality performance*** (Issau & Soni, 2019), such as ***product quality*** (Hoque, 2004), and ***versatile and valuable services*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2020), and ***supply chain*** if mismatched with demand can lead to ***valuable resource waste and needless production*** (Qamruzzaman & Karim (2020). The next subsection mentions input and output components.

- **Inputs and outputs**

Other OPP components encompass ***organisational inputs*** (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015), ***output perspectives*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016), and ***results*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), which produce ***efficiency*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016) and ***effectiveness*** (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015), as well as ***strategically*** linked and ***non-strategically*** linked measures (Kaplan, et al., 2012). Organisational ***inputs, output perspectives and efficiency*** add value to ***products and/or services***. In the next subsection, the components of value are listed.

- **Value**

Furthermore, ***value*** is an essential component of operational performance including the following aspects: ***organisational value*** (Merriman et al., 2016), ***value concern*** (Roome & Louche, 2016), ***value network*** (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2014), ***value destruction*** (Roome & Louche, 2016) ***value creation*** (Jansen van Rensburg & Mmako, 2017).), ***shared value formation*** (Rubio-Andrés, et al., 2020) and ***value delivery*** (Sawaean & Ali, 2020), which might lead to ***sales growth*** (Hakimah, et al., 2019). The ***value added*** might lead to the innovation of the whole OPP process, activities, and practices, such as organisational inputs, efficiency, output perspectives, services and product delivery. In addition to this, the next subsection takes a closer look at innovation.

- **Innovation**

I***nnovation*** (Hsueh & Tu, 2004) in all its forms, such as ***new ideas*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2020), ***innovation performance*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2018), ***technological innovation*** (Santa et al., 2014; Abdallah & Phan, 2016; Khan, et al., 2020), ***green process innovation*** (Bhatia, 2021), ***product innovation*** (Tarigan, 2018), such as ***versatile and valuable new products*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2020), ***new product introduction efficiency*** (Calvo-Mora, et al., 2013;); ***new product development*** (Issau & Soni, 2019), ***innovation capability*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2021), ***innovative culture*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2021), and ***innovation strategies*** (Duhaylongsod & De Giovanni, 2019). The remaining components of OPP are listed in the next subsection.

- **Other components**

OPP resources might include the following aspects: ***working environment*** (Ugheoke, 2021), a ***company's relationship with society*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), and ***company's relationship with stakeholders*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), as well as ***technology*** (Phuthi,

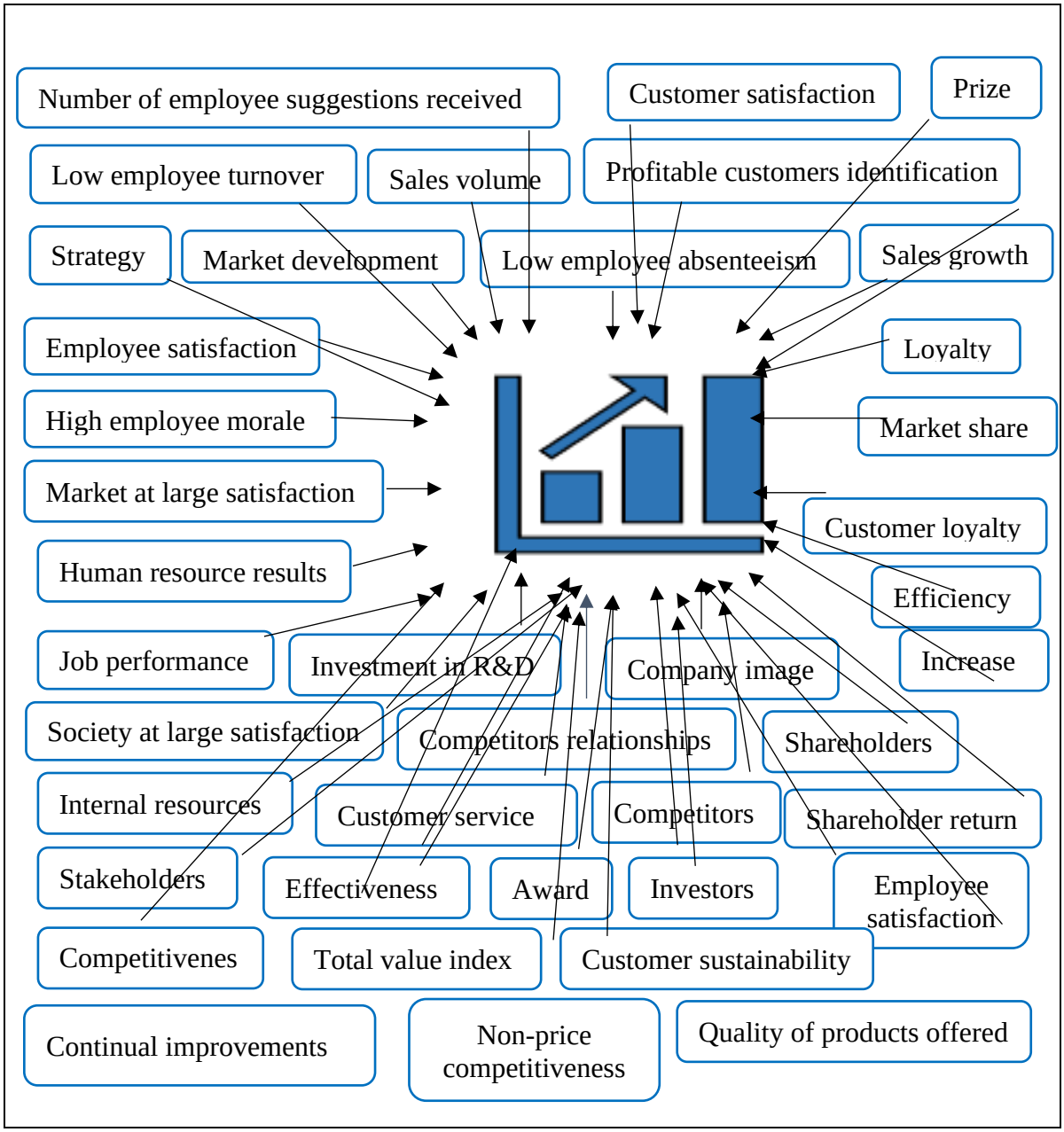
2016), while counting ***materials and devices*** might be considered as ***tangible resources*** of OPP dimensions. ***Economic goals*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016) and ***social goals*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), ***synthesis or a combination of knowledge*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2020), ***knowledge accumulation*** (De Brito & De Oliveira, 2016), and ***flexibility*** (Govindan et al., 2013) might be counted among the intangible properties of OPP perspectives.

The discussions above indicate that innovation might have an important role or input in this dimension and influence the achievement of operational performance and improvement. Moreover, Figure 2.2 shows that a company's operation emits pollution to the local environment but will impact globally in future, therefore, such situations will require the consideration, integration, and implementation of sustainability. Considering the community surrounding the business environment and the role OPP in the state economy, balancing sustainability pillars should be compulsory. The next section identifies multiple components relative to MP.

2.2.3 Market performance components

The ***Market*** definition is simple, although sometimes a useful tool for identifying market power. The ambiguity in what analysts mean by market power (price above marginal cost, or excess profits) cannot be resolved by market share. Figure 2.3 below shows the overall components of **market performance (MP**), giving a clear insight of what is the market dimension in OP (Carlton, 2007).

Figure 2.3: Market performance components frame



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.3 shows some components of the MP dimensions. In line with this figure, MP components might be categorised into employees, customers, completion, improvement, efficiency, and effectiveness. The next subsection focuses on employees.

- **Employees**

The MP indicator encompasses ***prizes*** (Antony & Bhattacharyya, 2010), ***number of employee suggestions received*** (Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2005;), ***low employee turnover rate*** (Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2005), ***strategy*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016), ***sales volume*** (Kohont & Zajc, 2019); ***high employee morale*** (Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2005;), ***sales growth*** (Green, et al., 2007), ***low employee absenteeism*** (Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2005), ***customer loyalty*** (Issau & Soni, 2019), ***employee satisfaction*** (Hoque, 2004), ***market share*** (Hoque, 2004), (Green, et al., 2007;), ***investment in R&D*** (Maletic, et al., 2014;), ***market development*** (Khana & Naeem, 2018; Calvo-Mora, et al., 2013). The next subsection deconstructs the concept of customers into subcomponents.

- **Customers**

The following are also elements of the MP dimension: ***profitable customers identification*** (Sampath & Krishnamoorthy, 2017); ***customer satisfaction*** (Issau & Soni, 2019), ***job performance*** (; Khana & Naeem, 2018), ***market at large satisfaction*** (Wijesekara, Kumara & Gunawardana, 2016), ***society at large satisfaction*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016), ***shareholder return*** (Kohont & Zajc, 2019), ***shareholder return performance*** (Kohont & Zajc, 2019), ***human resource results*** (Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2005;), ***company image*** (Mudjijah, et al., 2022), ***customer sustainability*** (Mudjijah, et al., 2022), ***employee satisfaction*** (Mudjijah, et al., 2022), ***award*** (Antony & Bhattacharyya, 2010), ***total value index*** (Antony & Bhattacharyya, 2010), and ***internal resources*** (Hailey, et al., 2005). The following subsection lists the components of competitiveness.

- **Competitiveness**

For ***competitiveness*** (Antony & Bhattacharyya, 2010), various competitiveness dimensions are part of market performance, namely ***competitive environment or milieu*** (Nematzadeh & Golouzan, 2018; Ethelmary & Obioma, 2020), ***active and competitive environment*** (Chopra, 2017); ***competitive market environment*** (Ugheoke, 2021), ***competitive strategies*** (Phuthi, 2016), ***competitive position*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018); ***competition share*** (Kohont & Zajc, 2019), ***competitive market*** (Rehman, et al., 2018a; Khan, et al., 2019), ***competitive edge*** (Chauhan & Singh, 2019), ***cost competitiveness*** (Antony & Bhattacharyya, 2010), ***price competitiveness*** (Antony & Bhattacharyya, 2010), and ***non-price competitiveness*** (Artto, 1987;). These are various variables or aspects of competitiveness.

All the above aspects might be considered as part of the ***competitive advantage*** (Koch & Windsperger, 2017; Lazenby, 2018; Tende & Ekanem, 2018; Arokodare & Asikhia, 2020; Gerald, et al., 2020), and likewise ***competitors*** (Collis, 2016;), ***competitors' relationships*** (Issau & Soni, 2019), and ***loyalty*** (Sampath & Krishnamoorthy, 2017). Market components are listed in the next subsection.

- **Market**

Furthermore, through OP as an important factor, organisations gain success in a ***competitive market*** (Rehman, et al., 2018a, 2019), ***quality of products offered*** (product differentiation advantage), and ***customer service*** (Chaharbaghi & Lynch, 1999). In addition, OP is an important factor, not only for the organisations but also for ***shareholders, stakeholders, and investors*** (Khan & Ali, 2017). Outcomes or delivery performance encompass ***market and society at large satisfaction, effectiveness, strategy, quality*** (Wijesekara, et al., 2016). ***Process performance*** includes two perspectives of performance (Wijesekara, et al., 2016), namely ***increase in sales*** (Mudjijah, et al., 2022), and ***increase in market share*** (Al-bawaia, et al., 2022; Teti & Montefusco, 2022). The following subsection explains efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Efficiency and effectiveness**

Efficiency (Mupani, 2016; Purusottama, 2020), and ***effectiveness*** (Obeidat, et al., 2017a, b; 2019; Alshurideh, et al., 2021) are the components of market performance. Below is a brief view of effectiveness and efficiency.

In short, OP is linked to ***efficiency and effectiveness*** (Niehaus, et al., 2018) and the 3Es, namely ***economy, efficiency, and effectiveness***, concerning a certain deed (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015), and ***marketing effectiveness*** (Issau & Soni, 2019). In other words, ***continual improvement*** of OP is essential (Ethelmary & Obioma, 2020). The next section is an overview of improvement.

- **Improvement**

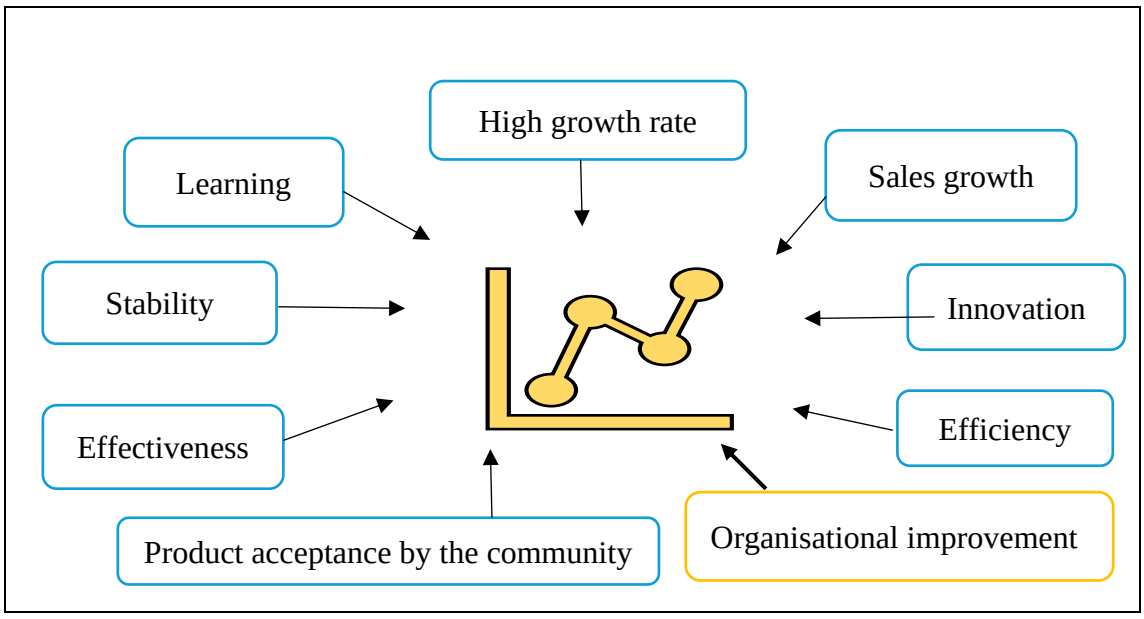
The mentioned aspects are required for ***continual OP improvement*** (Ethelmary & Obioma, 2020), likewise, these aspects of market should be improved (Chopra, 2017), more specifically, ***competitive edge*** and ***better return*** (Chauhan, et al. 2019). The appraisal of ***competitive***

strategies and management practices are the outcomes of ***improved competition*** (Phuthi, 2016;). Several GP components are listed in the section below:

2.2.4 Growth performance components

A brief presentation of growth performance (GP) components is provided in this section. Figure 2.4 below shows the components of GP.

Figure 2.4: Growth performance icon and components frame



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.4 shows the components of the GP dimension. According to Le and Phan (2017), ***profit and value*** are created from investment opportunities through a ***high growth rate***. then there is a positive link between ***growth*** and company performance. Thus, ***growth performance perspective*** comprises ***growth*** (Kurniati, 2019), such as ***sale growth*** (Margaritis & Psillaki, 2010), ***organisational learning*** (Phuthi, 2016), ***innovation*** (Iranmanesh, et al., 2020), ***steadily*** (Sampath & Krishnamoorthy, 2017), ***company's business effectiveness*** (Purusottama, 2020), ***efficiency*** (Le & Phan, 2017d), and ***product acceptance by the community*** (Purusottama, 2020).

The above icon (Figure 2.4) is an illustration of OP growth. One cannot talk about growth without referring to improvement. Thus, growth of performance can be directly linked to ***organisational improvement***. This has been confirmed by Kurniati, (2019). Surely, the overall ***OP improvement*** is the continual objectives of all organisations (Mupani, 2016), whether large or small, as well as profit- and non-profit focused (Mupani, 2016). In addition, the continual desirability of investors of organisation shares relies unavoidably on the improvement of FP (Kurniati, 2019). The following section discusses the theoretical foundations of this study.

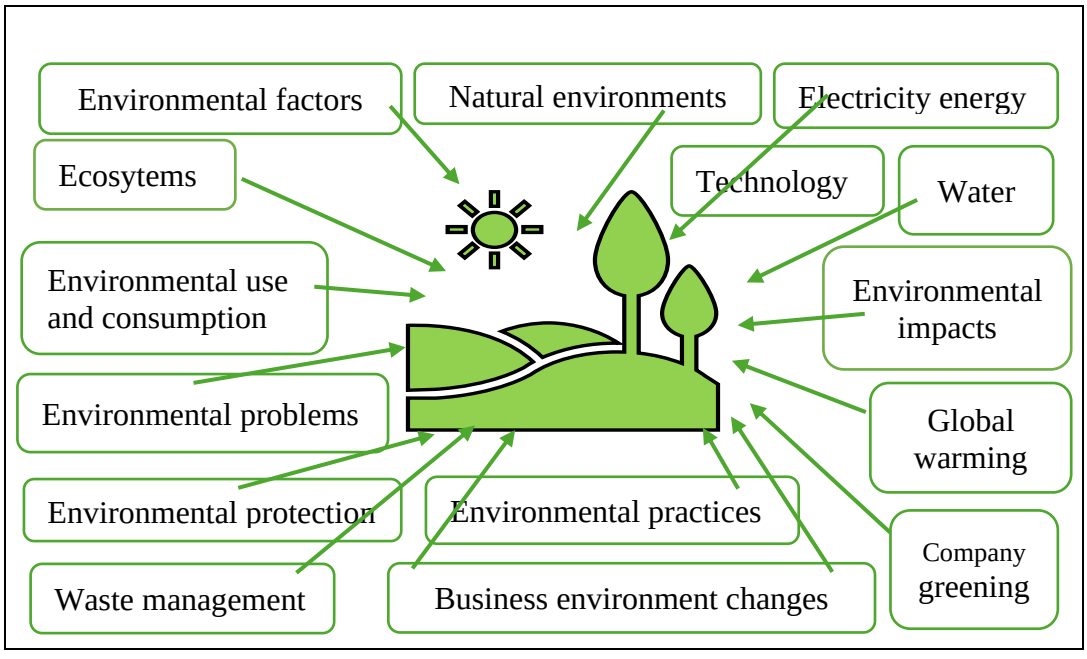
2.3 SUSTAINABILITY COMPONENTS

This section discusses the components of sustainability dimensions, which include the components of environmental, social, economic, and cultural sustainability pillars. The next section presents the components of ecological sustainability.

2.3.1 Environmental sustainability components

This section specifies components of environmental sustainability (ES) as an important dimension of sustainability.

Figure 2.5: Environmental sustainability components



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.5 exhibits multiple aspects or components of ***ES,*** such as ***environmental factors*** (Harvey, et al., 2019) including ***natural environments*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***company external environment*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), ***ecosystems*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018) and ***specific geographical factors*** (Grigorescu, et al., 2020). Likewise, ***environmental resources*** (Souza, et al., 2019), such as ***natural environment*** (Niehaus, et al., 2018), ***physical environment*** (Macaulay, et al., 2018), ***natural capital*** (Souza, et al., 2019), ***resource reserve*** (Dong & Hauschild, 2017), ***reverse logistics*** (Shaw, 2019), ***landscape*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***earth's land*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***air*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), and ***water resources*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018) are also part of the ES components.

Besides the above, ***environmental use*** including ***water consumption*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***environmental screening criteria*** (Hebb, 2019; Johnson, et al., 2019), ***warehouse operation*** (Dubey, et al., 2014a), ***industrialisation*** (Carden & Armitage, 2013), ***environmental impact*** (Dubey, et al., 2014a), ***safeguarding environment towards sustainability*** (Souza, et al., 2019), ***reducing adverse impact on the environment*** (Dubey, et al., 2014a), ***minimisation negative environmental impact*** (Niehaus, et al., 2018), ***energy*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***clean energy investments*** (Thornton & Aston, 2006), ***renewable energy*** (Incite Sustainability, 2009; Winkler & Marquard, 2011), ***cleaner electricity*** (Niehaus, et al., 2018), ***solar energy*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***energy use*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), and similarly, ***technology*** is also among environmental resource use, ***technology*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), and ***technology evaluation*** (Dong & Hauschild, 2017). Besides these, ES addresses the ecological problems that threaten organisations, countries, continents, and people's lives.

Environmental problems include ***land degradation*** (Nhamo, et al., 2019), ***land migration*** (Nhamo, et al., 2019), ***regional traffic*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***increase in traffic volume*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***absence of patterns*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), ***environmental uncertainty*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), ***environmental concerns*** (Hristov, et al., 2019), ***unpredictability*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), ***unexpected issues*** (Zhang & Lv, 2015), ***challenging environments*** (Nematzadeh & Golouzan, 2018), ***global warming*** (Niehaus, et al., 2018), ***climate change*** (Carden & Armitage, 2013; Bakos, et al., 2020), ***unexpected change*** (Wang, et al., 2013), ***external environmental changes*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), ***current global environmental crises*** (Morseletto, 2022), and ***business environment changes*** (Zhang & Lv, 2015). It is important to identify all ecological problems since it allows the problems to be

addressed for their remediation. To overcome these problems, the protection of the environment is essential.

Environmental protection includes the ***preservation of the environment*** (Ekiugbo & Papanagnou, 2017) and all its related aspects which are part of ES: ***safeguarding of the environment towards sustainability*** (Souza, et al., 2019), ***preserving natural resources*** (Niehaus, et al., 2018), ***minimisation depletion of resource reserves*** (Dong & Hauschild, 2017), ***continual ecological carrying capacity*** (Dong & Hauschild, 2017), ***reducing technology evolution impacts*** (Dong & Hauschild, 2017), ***preservation of earth's natural resources*** (Ekiugbo & Papanagnou, 2017), ***preservation of natural ecosystems*** (Mulenda, 2017)**.** The protection of the environment is important to prevent damage to the ecology. The establishment of strategies and methods might allow for the reduction and minimisation of further undesirable impacts of human activities on the environment. Some practices are appropriate to the ecology and may ensure the protection of the environment.

There are several ***environmental practices***. According to Masocha and Fatoki (2018), the European Commission identified the most significant environmentally sustainable practices by firms. ***Environmental practices*** have been labelled ***going green*** (Sardana & Singhania, 2018) and includes ***green implementation*** (Dubey, et al., 2014a), ***better green practices*** (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020), ***green eco-friendly factory*** (Dubey, et al., 2014a), ***company greening*** (Thornton & Aston, 2006), ***green governance*** (Mulenda, 2020)***, lean-green*** (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020), ***lean-green manufacturing*** (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020). In addition, ***lean practices*** (Abualfaraa, et al., 2020), ***regeneration potential and capacity*** (Buchko, 2011), and ***materials recycle or reuse*** for instance, in SA (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). These practices may enable the proper management of the environment.

Environmental management (Lokuwaduge & Heenetigala, 2017; Kitsikopoulos, et al., 2018) include ***standardised environmental management systems*** (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018), ***environment management techniques*** (Sardana & Singhania, 2018), ***sustainable resources management*** (Nhamo, et al., 2019), ***environmental and sustainability management systems*** (Hristov, et al., 2019), ***urbanisation*** (Nhamo, et al., 2019), ***urban water management*** (Carden & Armitage, 2013), ***demand pattern*** (Shaw, 2019), ***waste management*** (Kauppi, 2013), ***reduction of waste*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). Environmental management plays a vital role

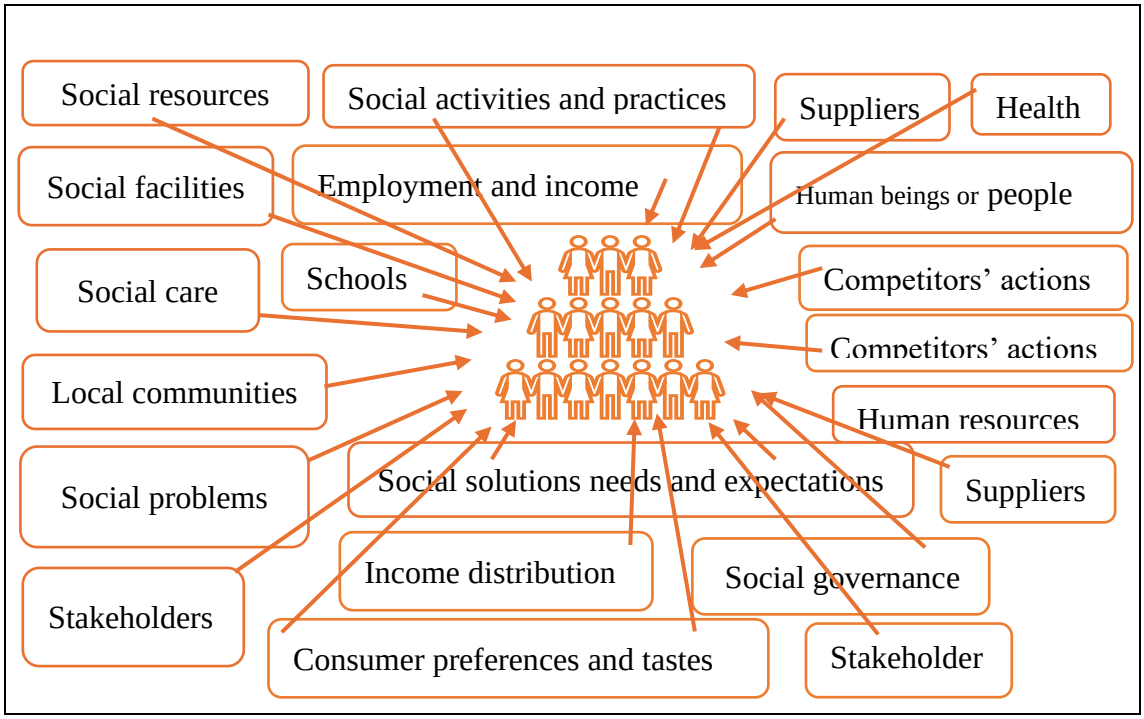
in its maintenance and improvement. In addition, some solutions are also suggested to solve the environmental problems, as listed below.

Some corrective measures for the ecological complications include ***business communities' awareness*** (Sardana & Singhania, 2018), ***waste reduction*** (Mannan, et al., 2016), ***closing production*** (Morseletto, 2022), ***narrowing production*** (Morseletto, 2022), and ***continual production process monitoring*** (Shaw, 2019). These solutions may help organisations to function properly. The next section lists the components of social sustainability dimensions.

2.3.2 Social sustainability components

This section lists the components of social sustainability (SS) dimensions. There exist multiple elements shaping SS as presented in Figure 2.6 below.

Figure 2.6: Social sustainability components



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.6 displays the components of the ***SS*** dimension which include the following: ***social resources, SS*** refers to people, ***human beings or people*** (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017), ***ordinary***

people (Veselovská, 2017), ***citizens*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***population*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***local communities*** (Govindan, et al., 2013), ***societies*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***local societies*** (Govindan, et al., 2013), ***communities*** (Veselovská, 2017), and their ***lives*** (Veselovská, 2017). For companies and other forms of organisations, social resources include ***human resources*** (Govindan, et al., 2013), ***suppliers*** (Dubey, et al., 2014a), ***contractual stakeholders*** (Govindan, et al., 2013), ***consumer tastes*** (Wang, et al., 2013;), ***consumer preferences*** (Halim & Halim, 2021), and ***competitors' actions*** (Wang, et al., 2013). Furthermore, aspects related to recreation are part of the SS components listed below.

SS refers to **social facilities** for educational purposes, such as ***schools*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020) or ***social facilities for entertainment***, such as ***sports clubs*** (Kauppi, 2013;), ***new swimming pool complex*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***maintenance and rehabilitation of old swimming pool complex*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***public open-air swimming pool complex*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020). Furthermore, ***social sustainability*** refers to care. Therefore, social care includes ***people care*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***healthcare (***Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***committees' health and protection*** (Govindan, et al., 2013). Moreover, social sustainability addresses social problems.

Social problems **or** ***SS problems*** *involve* ***unethical matters*** (Jämsä, et al., 2011), ***production of socially undesirable products*** (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007), ***demographics differences*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***super-rich people*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***very poor people*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***child labour*** (Galpin, et al., 2015), ***rapid population growth*** (Carden & Armitage, 2013), and ***increasing population growth*** (Nhamo, et al., 2019). These problems may be solved through activities and practices.

Social activities and practices are the components of SS which refer to activities including ***human activities*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***voluntary activities*** (Shaw, 2019), ***strategic sustainable progress*** (Enticott & Walker, 2008), ***SA8000*** (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018), ***OHSAS 18001*** (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018), ***social governance*** (Hebb, 2019), ***ethical view*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***outward societal norms*** (Govindan, et al., 2013), and ***social justice*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020). These implementations of these practices and activities may require outcomes that will meet societal needs.

Social solutions need and expectations include ***social inclusion*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***social support provision*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). ***social economy*** (Amin, et al., 20022), ***solidarity***

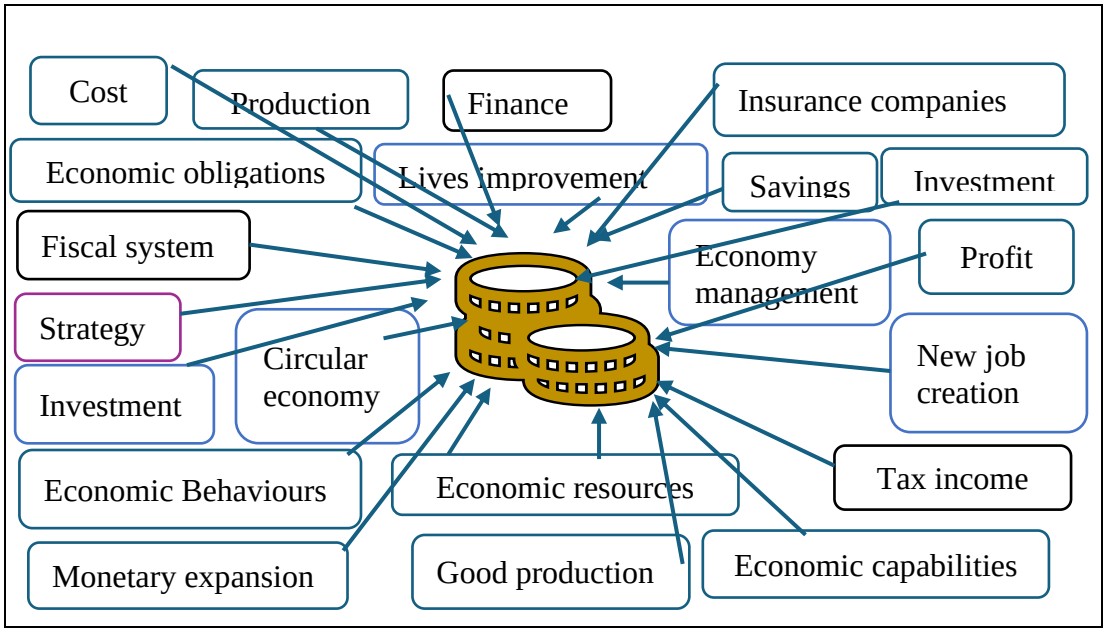
economy (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***society's response*** (Amin, et al., 2002) ***good society*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***normative view*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***very attractive society*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***societies' stability*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018) and ***societies' success*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). Furthermore, social sustainability refers to quality.

Social quality is also among the expectations of social sustainability and includes the following: ***improved life quality of everybody*** (Enticott & Walker, 2008), ***improve the quality of human lives*** (Ekiugbo & Papanagnou, 2017), ***societies' well-being*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***individuals' welfare*** (Johnson, et al., 2019), ***state of wellbeing*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***social progress*** (Mannan, et al., 2016), ***societal growth*** (Alhaddi, 2015), and ***happiness*** (Souza, et al., 2019). Beside companies, social needs and expectations are related to employment, such as ***employment recompense*** (Govindan, et al., 2013), ***job enrichment*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***job security*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***average income*** (Veselovská, 2017), and income ***distribution*** (Veselovská, 2017). Social quality is important since it can lead to people thriving and experiencing happiness. The section below lists the components of economic sustainability.

2.3.3 Economic sustainability components

This section lists the components of the economic sustainability (Eco.S) dimensions. Some are presented in the figure below:

Figure 2.7: Framework of economic sustainability components



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.7 displays the components of economic sustainability. ***Eco.S*** includes factors related to the economy**:** ***company economic success*** (Hristov, et al., 2019), ***dominant economic paradigm*** (McKenzie, 2004), ***economic emergence*** (Mulenda, 2020)**.** ***popular economy*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***economic contribution*** (Hristov, et al., 2019), ***economic frameworks*** (Morseletto, 2022), ***economic management*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***economic development*** (Gachie, 2019), ***circular economy*** (Morseletto, 2022), ***region's economy*** (Nowduri, 2012), ***macro-economic indicators*** (Veselovská, 2017), ***social economy*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***economy capability*** (Alhaddi, 2015), ***solidary economy*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020). Moreover, it should be noted that finance is part of the economy.

Eco.S encompasses factors related to finance**,** and includes ***financial performance*** (Johnson, et al., 2019), ***financial production matters*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***production of financial statements*** (Gachie, 2019), ***monetary expansion*** (Veselovská, 2017; Alcívar et al., 2020,), ***financial sustainability*** (Fernando, et al., 2023), ***increase revenue*** (Gachie, 2019), ***increase profitability*** (Gachie, 2019), ***increase return on investment*** (ROI) (Gachie, 2019), and ***greater future profits*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). In the same way, ***Eco.S*** is referred to as ***cost*** (Mannan, et al., 2016), such as ***cost reduction*** (Gachie, 2019), ***lowering costs of inputs***

(Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***environment costs*** (Campolo, et al., 2016). Saving is another aspect of Eco.S.

Eco.S encompasses factors related to saving, such as ***savings banks*** (González-Santa-Cruz, et al., 2019; Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***savings allocation*** (Štefko, et al., 2021), ***cooperative*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020). Furthermore, ***Eco.S*** includes factors related to investment***,*** for instance ***investment*** (Štefko, et al., 2021), ***organisations' investors' capital protection*** (Gachie, 2019), ***organisations' investors' capital sustainability*** (Gachie, 2009, 2019), and ***human-social needs within an institution*** (Gachie, 2019). Besides these, production is included in Eco.S.

Eco.S encompasses various factors related to ***production,*** such as ***economic production matters*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), ***continual goods production*** (Othman, et al., 2011), ***industrial production*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***realisation of production efficiencies*** (Yang & Hyland, 2012), ***new products*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***continual services production*** (Othman et al., 2011), ***agricultural production*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***various goods production*** (Wu, et al., 2013), ***various services production*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), and ***producing products required by customers*** (Yang & Hyland, 2012).

Besides the above, ***Eco.S*** includes factors related to ***economic obligations,*** such as ***fiscal system*** (Alhaddi, 2015), ***raising tax income*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020). ***mutual insurance companies*** (da Cruz Carvalho, et al., 2020), and ***mutual insurance companies*** (González Santa Cruz, et al, 2019)**.** However***, economic resources*** include ***resources*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), such as ***time*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018) and ***technology*** (Yang & Hyland, 2012). Furthermore, ***Eco.S*** also deals with aspects related to the economic behaviour, such as ***responsiveness*** (Wu, et al., 2013), ***sustainable management levels of government and external debt*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), and ***withdrawal from sectoral imbalances*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018).

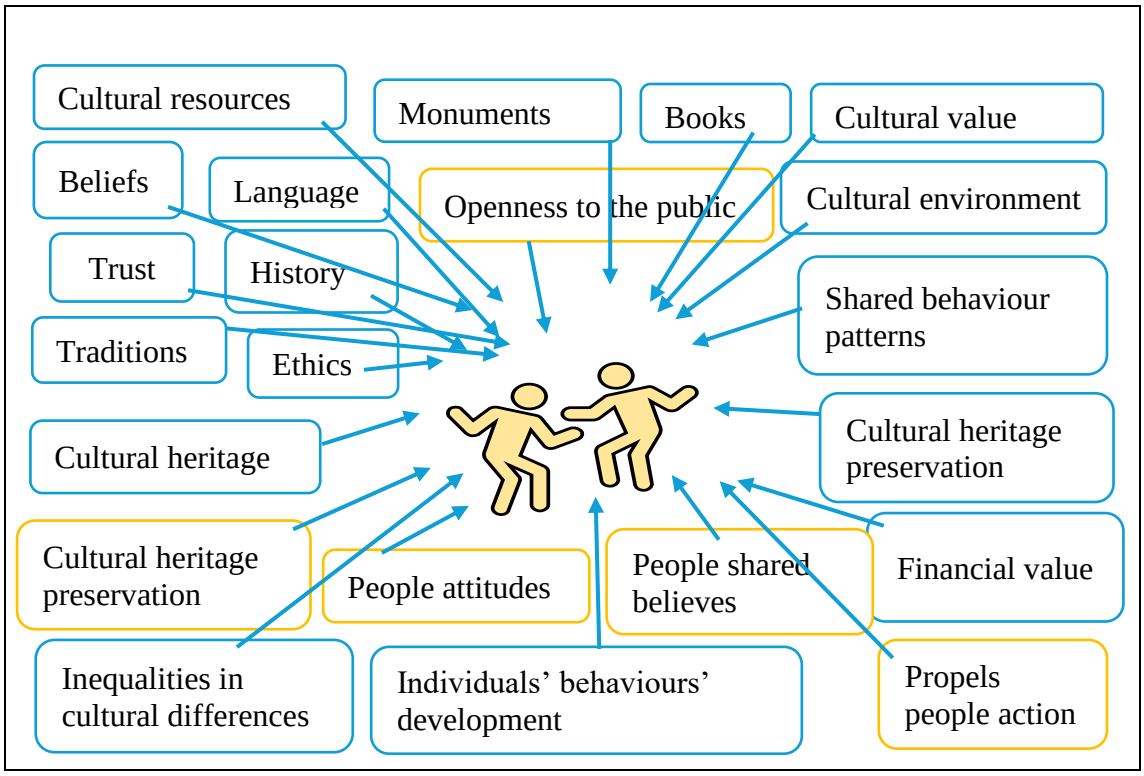
Other factors include first, **strategy**, ***business strategy*** (Fernando, et al., 2023), ***reactive strategies*** (Giblin & Burruss, 2009;), ***differentiation strategies*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), second, ***innovation*** (Yang & Hyland, 2012), ***restoration necessities*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***new job creation*** (Spraul & Thaler, 2020), ***new ideas*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), third, ***quality*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***quality improvement*** (Gachie, 2019), ***stakeholders' life quality improvement*** (Alcívar, et al., 2020), and ***capacit***y (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). Strategy,

innovation, quality and improvement are among the key success factors of an organisation. The section below lists the components of cultural sustainability.

2.3.4 Cultural sustainability components

This section enumerates the components of cultural sustainability (CS) dimension as displayed in Figure 2.8 below:

Figure 2.8: Cultural sustainability components



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.8 displays the components of cultural sustainability. ***CS*** components include various aspects related to ***values*** (Pop et al., 2019), ***live values*** (Pereira, et al., 2007), ***expression of concrete values*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***application of concrete values*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***values transmission*** (Hawkes, 2001), ***values processes preservation*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***increase appreciation of value*** (Loach, et al., 2017), i***ncrease understanding of value*** (Loach et al., 2017), ***transfer cultural values*** (UNESCO, 2013), ***shared values*** (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012; Barthel-Bouchier, 2015; Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), ***development of individuals' values*** (Janhonen-Abruquah, et al., 2018), ***intrinsic cultural value*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***deep***

values (Kraus, et al., 2020), ***financial value*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), and ***innovation as core values*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019). Cultural resources are discussed below.

CS resources include ***beliefs*** (Kraus, et al., 2020), ***shared beliefs*** (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012; Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), ***languages*** (UNESCO, 2013), ***books*** (Loach et al., 2017), ***works of art*** (UNESCO, 2013), ***cultural environment*** (Throsby, 2009), ***atmosphere of historic cities*** (Throsby, 2009), ***atmosphere of historic towns*** (Throsby, 2009), ***museums*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***libraries*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***buildings*** (UNESCO, 2013), ***monuments*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***atmosphere of historic cities*** (Throsby, 2009), ***atmosphere of historic towns*** (Throsby, 2009), ***technologies*** (Blagoeva-Yarkova, 2012), ***economic asset*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), ***intellectual property*** (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012), and ***natural environment*** (Sutter, 2008). CS is important as it allows the consideration and respect of people's identity when building relationships or networks. Other cultural resources include traditions.

Traditions (UNESCO, 2013) include the following aspects: ***traditional role*** (Museums Association, 2013.), ***development of traditions*** (Mannan, et al., 2016), ***cultural traditions*** (Garau, 2015), ***social traditions*** (Maziliauske, 2024), ***folklore*** (Loach et al., 2017). At the same time, multiple heritage aspects are the components of cultural sustainability, such as ***cultural heritage*** (Throsby, 2009), ***heritage economics*** (Throsby, 2009), ***heritage exposure*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***cultural heritage preservation*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***cultural heritage preservation*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***cultural heritage research*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***cultural heritage in sustainable urban areas*** (Throsby, 2009.), ***cultural heritage in urban planning*** (Girard, 2003), ***intangible cultural heritage*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***protection of cultural heritage assets*** (Soini & Birkeland, 2014), cultural ***heritage preservation*** (Kantabutra, 2011), ***cultural heritage research*** (Kantabutra, 2011), ***cultural heritage acquisition*** (Kantabutra, 2011), and ***tangible and intangible heritage*** (Throsby, 2009). Tradition might help people to keep their moral values and customs when interacting with others. Behaviours are also the components of cultural sustainability, as mentioned below.

CS includes the following behavioural aspects: ***shared behaviour patterns*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***environmental behaviour*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), ***human behaviour*** (Aquino, et al., 2009), ***behavioural and cultural antecedents*** (Kraus, et al., 2020), ***intangible***

cultural legacy (UNESCO, 2013), ***protection of cultural heritage assets*** (Soini & Birkeland, 2014), ***protection of cultural heritage assets*** (Loach, et al., 2017), cultural ***heritage preservation*** (Kantabutra, 2011), ***cultural heritage research*** (Kantabutra, 2011), ***cultural heritage acquisition*** (Kantabutra, 2011), ***tangible and intangible heritage*** (Throsby, 2009); ***individuals' behaviour development*** (Janhonen-Abruquah, et al., 2018), ***pro-social behaviour*** (Mayer et al., 2012), and ***behaviours of trust*** (Kraus, et al., 2020). Besides these, other CS components are listed below.

CS also includes the following aspects: ***specific cultural factors*** (Grigorescu, et al., 2020), ***culture model*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***culture shaping*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***culture control*** (Pop, et al., 2019), ***inherent investment in sustaining culture*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***inherent investment in promoting culture*** (Loach, et al., 2017), ***society disintegration from culture*** (Hawkes, 2001), ***practices*** (Pop, et.al., 2019), ***culture development practices*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), and ***propels people to action*** (Kraus, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, ***CS*** embraces behavioural aspects, such as ***people's attitudes*** (Kraus, et al. 2020), and ***openness to the public*** (Pop, et al., 2019). However, ***practices*** (Pop, et.al., 2019), ***culture development practices*** (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), ***propels people to action*** (Aquino, et al., 2009). Any aspect related to the past or history, such as ***cultural sustainability of regional/geographic cultural antecedents*** (Kraus, et al., 2020) ***Cultural sustainability problems*****:** ***inequalities in cultural differences*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), and ***inequalities in cultural differences*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018).

Other ***CS*** elements include: ***cultural features*** (Throsby, 2009), ***cultural policy*** (Loach et al., 2017), ***cultural mission*** (Kantabutra, 2011), ***inequalities in cultural differences*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), ***demographics in cultural differences*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018). ***cultures complex nature*** (Adam, 2010), ***growing concern for cultural sustainability*** (Loach et al., 2017), ***unique value of society*** (Loach et al., 2017), ***patterns of shared thoughts*** (Barthel-Bouchier, 2015), and ***implementation changes in ideas*** (Hawkes 2001). The next section discusses the theoretical foundations of this study.

2.4 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This section discusses the theoretical foundation adopted in this study, which includes the theory of knowledge and contingency theory:

2.4.1 Theory of knowledge

The literature review for this study followed Snyder's (2019) requirements. The adoption of the literature review method leads to building knowledge (Schryen, et al., 2015; Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019). This section discusses the theory of knowledge as a guide for the development of potential knowledge, followed by the contingency theory which refers to the foundation for further theory development.

The above signifies the basic concepts to search for and identify when reviewing the literature. Concepts keep the study on track relative to the phenomena under study and collecting related information to assist in answering the research questions, and in this case, on OP and sustainability. Furthermore, these concepts are used as the basis for the literature search, the discussion of the findings, the identification of gaps in the reviewed literature, and the drawing of recommendations, the research agenda, and the practical and managerial implications. The integrative literature review aimed to increase the knowledge and literature of OP and sustainability; as a result, the suggestion is that future research be based on the missing key concepts of previous studies. Furthermore, the theory of knowledge was considered to ensure that the process of knowledge-building was observed before conducting the integrative literature review.

Besides the above, the study followed the principles of a literature review, which always starts from the broadest to the context of the study. Similarly, an appropriate thesis should begin at the general findings in the literature to use as the guidelines, framework, or model to be applied. In this study, the generalisation of the findings could not only use the SA context but had to consider the SMEs in the broadest sense when collecting the research information to allow for the generalisation of the findings.

The Sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 in Chapter 1 and Sections 2.2 and 2.3 in Chapter 2 detailed the elements of OP, sustainability, SMEs and SMEs' OP, SMEs and SMEs' sustainability, the

framework of the key search components and the context of the study. This was important since it assisted in building a theory grounded on the two phenomena under study (OP and sustainability). The theory of knowledge (TK) for the literature review was selected given the integrative literature review method applied in this study. This theory was not selected to build novel or extend the existing theories but was used rather as a guide to conduct the literature review in an organised and structured way.

Schryen, et al., (2015) acknowledged the important role played by literature reviewed in knowledge building, particularly scientific knowledge (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014a; Jennex, 2015). This study adopted the literature review method, therefore, to collect and analyse literature to develop potential knowledge.

Okoli (2012) and Paré, et al. (2015) separated the different forms of literature reviews according to their purpose. Thus, Schryen, et al. (2015) listed them as a section of a project proposal, a thesis, a primary research article or a standalone publication. The literature review conducted in this study was not only a part of the thesis, but rather the full research method, and simultaneously, a technique chosen for the collection of data or the investigation of previous studies related to the topic of sustainability and OP of SMEs in general and on SA SMEs, in particular.

Schryen, et al. (2015) suggested generating inputs exceeding the pure synopsis of the current material. These contributions included identifying the research gaps, the framing of research in theory (Jennex, 2015), and individual evaluations and interpretations (Blaxter, et al., 2010). The study reviewed literature on SMEs in general, but to comply with the principle of the literature review starting from the broadest to the context under study, the gaps in the reviewed literature were identified for SA SMEs only, as this was the context of this study. Identifying the gaps was conducted on three levels: first, by considering the factors and aspects of the SME literature not covered in the SA SMEs context; second, by identifying the missing issues related to the four OP dimensions (financial, operational, market and growth, and their related components), and third, the missing components of the four sustainability perspectives (environmental, economic, social, and cultural).

There is consensus in the reviewed literature (Fink, 2013) that the synthesis (Contribution 1) found is a mandatory contribution. All the contributions provided in Chapter 5 are based on the findings generated from the reviewed literature.

Shrien et al. (2015) propose six contributions generated from the literature review, namely synthesis or integrated categorical-conceptual framework, adoption of a new perspective, theory building, theory testing, identification of research gaps, and the provision of a research agenda. This study observed all these requirements and implemented them in Chapter 5. Besides the theory of knowledge, the second theory used in the study is the contingency theory discussed below:

2.4.2 Contingency theory

According to Cui, et al. (2014), contingency theory was introduced in the influential works of Lawrence and Lorsch (1967). In contingency theory (CT), factors clarifying or predicting anticipated phenomena are analysed (Gacenga, et al., 2011). Similarly, the development of various theories has been based on contingency analysis (Thai, 2015). CT reduces assumptions regarding theoretical propositions (Gacenga, et al., 2011). This study referred to the concepts and theories in contingency theory, which had the potential of expanding existing theories or developing new theories. Contingency theory helped to expand the existing concepts of sustainability and OP in an SME context or explored building a new theory from different aspects of these concepts in this study (Tsai & Liao, 2017). The contingency theory in this study was based on the contingencies of sustainability, OP and SMEs.

Contingency Theory (CT) has been defined by experts in organisation theories (Anwar, 2015). The characteristics of CT are discussed below: CT has a static nature (Donaldson, 2006). The role of CT has been discussed in several studies (Gacenga, et al., 2011). Chandler (1962) provided the finest description of CT of organisations, i.e. established propositions loosely arranged with steadfast principles and the view of organisation schemes. In CT factors clarifying or predicting anticipated phenomena are analysed (Umanath 2003). CT offers a major framework for organisational design (Donaldson, 2006). CT reduces assumptions regarding theoretical propositions (Gacenga, et al., 2011).

This study referred to the concepts and theories in the CT, which have the potential of expanding existing theories or developing new theories. Contingency theory helped to expand the existing concepts of sustainability and OP in the SME context or build new theories from different aspects of these concepts discovered in this study (Tsai & Liao, 2017).

In CT, organisational analysis should be endorsed and viewed from the link established between multi-variables of the organisation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The qualitative nature of this study constructed a conceptual framework to establish the link between the components of corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership and modernity factors.

According to CT, there is no single best way of providing the most suitable solutions to organisations (Lartey, 2020). This study considered various aspects, such as corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, sustainability, and new factors to solve the issues associated with OP and sustainability achievement, OP and sustainability challenges, sustainability integration into OP, implementation of sustainability in OP and approaches for balancing sustainability.

The study referred to the concepts and theories of the contingency theory with the potential of expanding the existing theories or developing new theories, if necessary. Contingency theory was important in this study as it suited studies conducted on organisations. The development of various theories was based on contingency analysis (Thai, 2014). Furthermore, in line with the topic of this study, CT was divided into CT of OP, CT of sustainability, and CT of SMEs. Besides contingency theory, other theories relevant to this study could have been used, as discussed below. Thus, the subsequent section exchanges views on CT of OP.

2.4.3 Contingency theory of organisational performance

OP and a firm's performance are synonymous (Rajasekar & Jeyasutharsan, 2013). Theories related to OP and business performance were considered when designing the study using appropriate contingency concepts. This study was founded on variables that were appropriate to performance and organisations, particularly SMEs.

CT proclaims that some management and organisational characteristics are related to OP (Child, 1975) in a variety of broad assorted working conditions. CT facilitates the connection

between performance and the organisational variables (Chung, et al., 2003). In the same way, contingency factors are the contextual aspects moderating the affiliation between the organisational scheme and its performance (Hamann, 2017). Furthermore, CT acknowledges the existence of numerous factors affecting the adoption of management methods and practices by organisations, which affect organisational design and performance, as well as the adoption of market changes (Luthans & Stewart, 1977; Fernández-Robin, et al., 2019).

CT instructs the alignment of organisational characteristics that reflect the state of the organisation to achieve organisational effectiveness (Donaldson, 2001; Maletic, et al., 2018). Enhanced OP is achieved through the contingency factors of an organisational system (Hamann, 2017). Organisational effectiveness is interpreted through contingency theories (Tosi & Slocum, 1984) and determination. The purpose of CT is to consider how the projected performance of organisations is related to the internal and external environments of a business (Homburg, et al., 2012).

With the above in mind, CT was deemed appropriate for identifying factors affecting a sustainable OP design, sustainable SMEs, the environmental, social, and economic performance, as well as financial, operational and market share performance with the adoption of transformative profitability, productivity, and market share. This provided opportunities to develop theories for sustainable management and sustainable organisational characteristics related to sustainable OP, including sustainable profitability, sustainable productivity, sustainable market share and sustainable growth.

Furthermore, OP and a firm's performance are synonymous (Rajasekar & Jeyasutharsan, 2013), therefore, theories related to OP and business performance were considered to design the study using appropriate contingency concepts. This study was founded on variables appropriate to performance and organisations, particularly in the context of SMEs. CT of sustainability is the focus of the next section.

2.4.4 Contingency theory of sustainability

The fitting of an organisation between its structures, strategies and environmental conditions has been the concern of CT (Child, et al., 2003). CT suggests that the required organisational design for greater performance is determined by its ecological situations (Donaldson, 2001). In

the CT, environment, size and sustainability determine an organisation's behaviour (Fernández-Robin, et al., 2019). In addition, Maletic, et al. (2018) suggest that a novel and valuable viewpoint of the implementation of sustainability practices is the CT.

Based on the above supposition, this study intended to explore the underlying contingencies of sustainability integration, implementation, and balance, as well as sustainable OP and sustainable SMEs. CT identifies the most influential contingent factors in the adoption, implementation, and consequences of ecological practices (Fernández-Robin, et al., 2019). CT was used in this study to identify contingent factors related to OP and environmental, social, and economic sustainability practices, as well as those related to the integration, implementation and balancing of environmental, social and economic sustainability aspects.

Organisational behaviours are determined by the environment in which the business operates and the size of the business establishment, where large- and medium-sized organisations are more committed to sustainable development. Appropriate contingency concepts and theories were used to support the design of sustainable performance of the research topic. Hence, theories on environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability are considered. However, the CT of SMEs is described in the next section.

2.4.2 Contingency theory of small and medium enterprises

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), there are no universal rules of organisation and management. However, the principal outline for organisational design is provided by CT (Donaldson, 2006). The basics of CT are acknowledged to be a common tool for studying organisations. In other words, the CT of organisations is described by a roughly prearranged set of propositions with committed principles providing an overview of an organisation's systems. Furthermore, CT is defined by a multivariate examination of the connection between the main organisational variables that are fundamental to the organisational analysis (Rejc, 2004). This study considered various factors and concepts related to SMEs' performance and SMEs' sustainability, sustainability implementation, integration and balance that were found in the reviewed literature.

Therefore, adopting CT for this study was relevant because it was appropriate for studies conducted on organisations, such as SMEs, which was the case study for this research. The CT allowed for the identification of key organisational variables fundamental to SMEs. Moreover, in CT, size influences several operational management practices (Taylor & Taylor, 2014). McAdam, et al., (2019) suggest that CT is more appropriate for SME studies rather than best practice methods. The use of CT in this study helped to expand theories in line with the impact of SMEs on OP, particularly related to profitability, productivity, growth, and market share. A summary of this chapter is provided below.

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the components of sustainability and OP dimensions for a better understanding and further interpretation of the findings generated from the collected data. It discussed the two theories adopted in this study, i.e. the theory of knowledge facilitated the implementation of the integrative literature review method conducted in this study, while CT was selected to support new theories proposed in this study (Chapter 5). Furthermore, CT was studied from three perspectives, namely CT of OP, CT of sustainability and CT of SMEs.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology adopted for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 discusses the overall process and practices of the research methodology adopted in this study. The chapter is structured in the following manner: Section 3.2 research paradigm; Section 3.3 research approach; Section 3.4 research design; Section 3.5 research choice; Section 3.6 research time horizon; Section 3.7 research area; Section 3.8 research method; Section 3.9 literature collection technique; Section 3.10 target literature; Section 3.11 literature sampling and collection process; Section 3.12 literature management; Section 3.13 interpretation of the literature; Section 3.14 identification of the gap in the literature; Section 3.15 research agenda; Section 3.16 truthfulness of the findings; Section 3.17 reliability and validity; Section 3.18 ethical considerations; Section 3.19 advantages of literature review; Section 3.20 limitations of the study and Section 3.21 the summary. The following section discusses the research paradigm adopted in this study.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM: INTERPRETIVISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

This section discusses research paradigms concerning the significant role they play in defining perceptions of sustainability and operational performance in South African SMEs. This was crucial for selecting appropriate research approaches and methods, as well as establishing procedures for data collection and analysis.

Creswell (2014) offers various definitions of a research paradigm. In the context of this study, a paradigm may be defined as a model or framework for the perception, observation and understanding of OP and sustainability phenomena that shape SMEs in general and SA SMEs in particular (Babbie, et al., 2007).

The set of beliefs generated from the findings of sustainability and OP observed in this study shape its paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) were convinced that these beliefs are accepted as the truth, which cannot be proven conventionally, and there are no basic criteria that allow for the elevation of one paradigm over another. Furthermore, the paradigm of this study was based on worldwide scholars' publications and the community of scientists' investigations and assumptions on sustainability and OP in SMEs (Deshpande, 1983).

There are four research paradigms (Matthews & Ross, 2010), namely ***positivism, interpretivism, constructivism,*** and ***realism***. Quantitative methods are used in a positivism paradigm (Hennink, et al., 2011), whereas interpretivism, constructivism, and realism paradigms are used in qualitative methods (Healy & Perry, 2000).

The realism paradigm discovers the reality of a phenomenon; besides its inadequacies (Healy & Perry, 2000), the focus is on actual events, circumstances, and consequences (Creswell, 2014). This was not suitable for this study but rather the two accepted paradigms discussed in the section below.

3.2.1 Constructivism paradigm

According to Healy and Perry (2000), the constructivism paradigm is appropriate for social science research. It emphasises the understanding of the surrounding world of individuals (Creswell, 2014). According to Bashir et al. (2008) constructivism in social science interprets all knowledge and reality that are built in and out of interaction between people and their world and developed and transmitted within a specific social context.

This study focused on the reality of knowledge of OP and sustainability generated from the interaction between scholars and people working in SMEs in general, and SA SMEs in particular, by investigating publications between 2017 and 2024. Moreover, social constructivism is frequently combined with interpretivism (Creswell, et al., 2007; Mertens, 1999).

3.2.2 Interpretivism paradigm

This interpretive study explored sustainability and OP in SMEs (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) by reviewing the related literature on SMEs to obtain information regarding the background of sustainability and OP, and people's experiences which had an impact on the investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2003). An interpretive research outcome involves describing sustainability and OP realities in terms of enablers and challenges, as well as sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in OP with its density intact (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). The interpretivism paradigm is discussed below in further detail.

This interpretive study explored the social reality of SMEs of factual sustainability issues, impacts and risks experienced in OP (Mohajan, 2018) by analysing published literature on the subject. The interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate of the three research philosophies to use to respond to the research questions. This was based on 'invisible' participants' opinions available in published studies and descriptions of the OP problems, sustainability issues, integration, implementation and balance in the OP of SMEs in general and particularly SA SMEs.

The study is interpretive because it involved the exploration, understanding and interpretation of the literature based on sustainability and OP of SMEs, as mentioned above which are comprehensively presented (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The research approach adopted in this study is discussed in the next section.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE

This section discusses the research approach adopted for this study. There are three research approaches, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

A quantitative approach is focused on random sampling and the use of numbers (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative studies concern prediction, cause-effect relationships, outcomes, and generalisations (Yilmaz, 2013). The quantitative approach intends to produce numbers and manipulate them using various statistical methods (Hashemnezhad, 2015).
The advantages of a quantitative research approach are that it provides quantitative/numerical results, simplifies the processing of large amounts of data, making the comparison of data

easier, personal feelings or opinions do not influence the study, individual feelings or views do not influence the consideration and representation of the research and evidence (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). However, there are many limitations in analysing quantitative data (Kracauer, 1952).

The quantitative approach enables the expansion of the assessment of numerical indicators (Martin & Bridgmon, 2012; Basias & Pollalis, 2018). However, serious problems with the quantitative approach are the non-response to questionnaires (Krathwohl, 1993), respondents lack free expression and opinion, questionnaires with unclear questions that cannot be modified (Gall & Borg, 1989) and ambiguities that cannot be clarified (Abdullah & Raman, 2000). The researcher unfortunately, has no power to force the respondents to return questionnaires or on time (Bryman, 2017). The quantitative approach can be combined with another approach, qualitative to overcome some of the above-mentioned weaknesses.

A *mixed methods approach* is not about using quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Nassaji, 2015), but rather combining these two methods to achieve the research objectives of a study (Creswell, 2014, 2017; Ragab & Arisha, 2018). This study did not combine the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The limitations of mixed methods are the difficulties of mixing information from four different methods (Iaquinto, 2018) and the lack of a single correct way to use this approach (Iaquinto, 2017). However, since such a combination of methods could not be used in this study these limitations are not a concern. The next section discusses the qualitative research approach.

3.3.1 Qualitative approach

This section debates the qualitative approach as applied in this study. A qualitative approach is concerned with the description and understanding of the phenomena or an event being studied as it relates to human experience (Cooper & White, 2012). This study is a qualitative study (Bashir, et al., 2008) because it does not involve statistical data (Mohajan, 2018). The study investigated the OP (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016) of local SMEs (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016) and explored the sustainability issues associated with OP faced by people working in SMEs (Hashemnezhad, 2015). Furthermore, it deals with the portrayal and consideration of the OP phenomenon, particularly in terms of the implementation of sustainability in OP within South African SMEs.

A qualitative approach was deemed suitable because the study described sustainability as perceived by people (authors), who conducted studies in various SMEs. It allowed for the collection of qualitative data based on people's (authors) perceptions, opinions, and experiences, which were analysed and interpreted qualitatively to obtain a better understanding of sustainability and OP in SA SMEs. As a qualitative approach, any spontaneous and unexpected elements discovered in the literature review were advantageous (Grudens-Schuck, et al., 2004).

This study did not use numbers or random sampling; but rather it was concerned with the description and understanding of the critical review of literature on sustainability and OP in South African SMEs, therefore, a qualitative approach was adopted. In addition, the choice of a research design is discussed in the following section. The qualitative research conducted here on OP and sustainability in SMEs provided insight and consideration of the research problems (Karami, et al., 2006). The following section motivates the advantage of the structural approach for this study.

3.3.2 Structural approach

This section explains the structural approach adopted in this study. Kumar (2018) distinguishes two approaches to investigation, such as unstructured and structured approaches. Kumar (2018) clarified that in an unstructured approach, all research process aspects are flexible, while the research process in a structured approach is programmed. This study adopted a structured approach which viewed the prearrangement of the overall research process (Kumar, 2018).

There was a logical structure and link between the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions planned to find answers indirectly from the literature through published works, research assumptions, research design, the collected literature, the analysed literature, findings, interpretations, discussions, limitations, and recommendations from the research agenda. The advantage of this type of approach allows a sustained focus on sustainability and OP and the respective research questions about generic SMEs and SA SMEs while avoiding any deviation. The following section discusses the research design adopted for this study.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: EXPLORATORY AND DESCRIPTIVE

This section discusses the design adopted for the study. There are four kinds of research designs, namely embedded design, explanatory design, exploratory design, and descriptive design, which refer to three purposes of social research, namely exploration, description, and explanation (Babbie, et al., 2007).

Embedded design like in an embedded study, multiple sustainability issues associated with OP could be acknowledged and understood, to identify sustainable OP strategies to overcome them (Vindrola-Padros, et al., 2017; Shahabuddin, et al., 2020), to transform OP in terms of sustainability (Churruca, et al., 2018) and ensure sustainable OP improvement (Langlois, et al., 2019). The embedded design allows for the collection of multiple sources of data. An ***explanatory design research*** deals with the explanation of a situation or problem under investigation (Babbie, et al., 2007). An assumed explanatory study may or may not implicate the causal relationship (Rensuson & Host, 2009).

Embedded design is not applicable as the current study does not apply multiple sources of the data collection or mixed methods as required in the use of an embedded design. Instead, this study used a single data collection method which was the integrative literature review. Likewise, ***explanatory design*** is not applicable as this study is not meant to explain sustainability and OP of SA SMEs, but to explore and describe sustainability and OP enablers, challenges, steps for sustainability integration into OP, phases for implementing sustainability in OP and balancing sustainability in OP of SA SMES. Besides these, the next two sections discuss the research design adopted in this study.

3.4.1 Exploratory design

This section debates the exploratory design adopted in this study. Babbie et al. (2007) explained that explorative research entails the exploration or examination of a new interest or subject of study. As an exploratory design, a variety of literature based on SMEs were used as the context investigated in this research (Poulter, 2006). The study explored OP in South African SMEs in terms of the capability of sustainability to enhance the performance of these organisations (Babbie, et al., 2007).

The exploratory design was most appropriate for responding to the research questions, by revealing the existing sustainability problems in SMEs' performance, the consecutive steps for integrating sustainability into OP, and for implementing sustainability in OP, as well as establishing a balance between the environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects of SMEs' performance in South Africa.

An exploratory design was also appropriate for answering research questions based on existing studies on the current topic. Using an exploratory design, this study explored the following themes: the challenges that impede the attainment of sustainability in SMEs; the challenges that impede the attainment of OP in SMEs; the steps for incorporating sustainability into OP; the phases for implementing sustainability in OP; the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs which are related to the research objectives of this study. This study aimed to explore OP and the sustainability of SA SMES through ILR (Ray & Zarestky, 2021). The next section discusses descriptive design.

3.4.2 Descriptive design

This section discusses the implementation of a descriptive design in this study. Descriptive research refers to the observation and description of situations and events (Babbie, et al., 2007). The ***descriptive design*** was useful for this study to describe the incorporation, implementation and balancing of sustainability issues in OP (Renusonand & Host, 2009). Similarly, a description of sustainability, OP and SME characteristics was provided in this study (Nassaji, 2015).

The descriptive design also assisted to answer questions on how sustainability could be integrated, implemented, and balanced in SMEs based on the findings of the reviewed literature, as well as to describe SMEs' sustainability and performance from the published point of view of selected authors' publications. A longitudinal study from 2017 to 2024 of sustainability in OP of SMEs was investigated and described using the targeted literature. Literature was selected and classified according to the research objectives and questions of this study (Babbies, et al., 2007).

A descriptive research design was employed in this study to confirm (Sileyew, 2019) the following assumptions made in Chapter 1, Section 1.7:

- There are challenges that impede the attainment of sustainability in the OP of SMEs
- There are enablers that facilitate the attainment of sustainability in the OP of SMEs,
- There are steps for incorporating sustainability into OP.
- There are phases for implementing sustainability in OP.
- There are approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs.

Descriptive research provides a precise profile of conditions, events and people (Saunders, et al., 2009) and similarly, describes relevant facets of the phenomena under study from the perspectives, such as individual, organisational, and industry-oriented (Sileyew, 2019). This study focused on the organisational perspective. Therefore, adopting the descriptive design allowed for the literature review regarding sustainability and OP of SMEs and the sustainability of SMEs, and the OP of SMEs.

According to Sileyew (2019), the descriptive design allows for the collection of data from a wide range of sources, as was achieved for this review of the literature for this study, as well as the analysis of responses (Sileyew, 2019). The analysis of all aspects of sustainability and OP of SMEs was approached from a qualitative descriptive perspective. The next section discusses the selection of the research approach for this study.

3.5 RESEARCH CHOICE: MONO METHOD

In this section, the selection of the research approach is explained. There are three types of research approaches: multi-methods, mixed methods, and mono methods. The next subsection discusses multi-methods.

- **Multi-methods**

According to Wahyuni (2012), the multi-method uses quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather data and apply various methods to analyse the data. This study used a single qualitative technique for the data collection and two qualitative techniques for the data analysis. Therefore, it is not multi-method research. Mixed methods are discussed in the following subsection.

❖ Mixed method

To reach the research objectives of a study, mixed methods combine quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2012; Ragab & Arisha, 2018). This study did not mix methods to collect data; therefore, a mixed-method choice is not applicable. According to Ojebode et al. (2018) a mixed-method research approach provides many and more dependable sources of evidence, which leverage the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms in finding answers to social problems. It has been found to produce broad-based empirical evidence that is more appealing to policymakers. The next subsection discusses the mono-method.

❖ Mono method

This study adopted a single method for data collection which is the literature review methodology as discussed in this chapter. Therefore, it is a mono-method. Adopting this mono-method was a great experience. What was learned was that for the consistency of the study, a large population should be targeted with a variety of samples. This would not replace a multi- or mixed method approach but add value to the mono-study regarding the quality of the collected and analysed data and the respective findings.

According to Martin (1990), there are two significant mono-method arguments. The first, a simple mono-method argument, proposes that one type of method is generally better than another. The second, a complex mono-method approach, argues that one type of method is better than another for the purpose of addressing a particular theoretical issue. Because these two positions have been advocated frequently, this chapter explored both. There are quantitative and qualitative versions of the simple mono-method approach. The simple mono-method approach shares knowledge of OP and sustainability phenomena. However, this choice has some weaknesses as discussed below.

Ojebode et al. (2018) acknowledge the weakness of such a method frequently offering wide-ranging solutions to social problems. Thus, to overcome this imperfection, this study collected many examples of literature on OP and SMEs, sustainability, and SMEs, as well as sustainability OP and SMEs with the expectation of obtaining adequate answers to solve the

identified problems in this study. The time horizon of this study is discussed in the following section.

3.6 TIME HORIZON: LONGITIDUNAL

This section explains the time horizon adopted for this study. Designing a study involves time. Babbie et al., (2007) distinguishes between ***cross-sectional and longitudinal studies*** in research design. The implementation of the first option involves the observation or ***cross-sectional*** examination of a sample, population or phenomenon at one point in time.

A cross-sectional study allows the data collection from various participants at a single point in time. In this study, data were collected from various sources at multiple points in time. Therefore, it is not a cross-sectional study. While ***longitudinal studies*** are conducted several times (Gehman, et al., 2018) and are used where a study focuses on a specific phenomenon at a certain time. The interest for this study was literature on sustainability and OP phenomena in SMEs in general and particularly in SA from 2017 to 2024. Therefore, a longitudinal research method was most appropriate. This study considered the rich longitudinal data requirement (Gehman, et al., 2018).

Annual literature related to the problems identified in OP and the sustainability of SA SMEs was collected from various databases of the **University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg's** online library, allowing for the same phenomenon to be observed over an extended period from 2017 to 2024. This study adopted a longitudinal time horizon appropriate for a literature review method. For this purpose, literature related to the research questions was studied over time (Gehman, et al., 2018). The yearly published reading materials included academic articles, journals, reports, conference papers, dissertations, theses, handbooks, and material that contained comparable, relevant information related to the topic under study. The research area of the study is discussed in the following section.

3.7 RESEARCH AREA

This section discusses the research area of this study. According to Kumar (2018), a research project for a higher degree, such as a Master's and PhD, should have a focus area of the

researcher's expertise. The author adds that a thorough review of literature helps fulfil this expectancy. With this in mind, this study investigated literature on sustainability and OP of South African SMEs, meaning that it focused on the functioning of organisations about sustainability and performance and how organisations behave or respond to these. Therefore, the study falls within the Management area encompassing Business and Business Management.

Furthermore, for the success of this study and the findings emanating from this study, a line was crossed in the data collection process by focusing on the following areas: sustainable development to study the sustainability phenomenon; performance OP; institutional or organisation to include SMEs, and entrepreneurship concerning SMEs, all in the context of this study. Therefore, the reviewed literature included these areas for this study. The reading material collected for this study was related to management, business, business management, performance, sustainable development, organisation, and entrepreneurship-related sources. The next section focuses on the research method used in this study.

3.8 RESEARCH METHOD: INTEGRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW METHOD

This section explained the selected research method applied in this study, which was an integrative literature review. The following section discusses the qualitative research method.

3.8.1 Qualitative research method

This section provided an overview of qualitative research methods. According to Crotty (1998) and Scotland (2012), methods are the detailed techniques and procedures used for data gathering and analysis. There are several methods used in qualitative research (Creswell, et al., 2007). Studies by Petty et al., 2012 acknowledge the five alternative fields for qualitative research, namely narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

Additional contributions were made by Liamputtong (2013), who states that oral stories, life stories and bibliographical research, as well as memory work, are components of the narrative research method. The use of different techniques to gather and analyse data is called research

methods (Petty, et al., 2012) which are cautious and methodical ways of solving problems within a lifeblood of any scientific discipline (Walliman, 2021). The components of these methods were listed by Theofanidis et al. (2018) and Daniel et al. (2024) as follows: questions, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, as well as validation. However, Marshall and Rossman (2014); Baratto and Baratto (2020) and Shahapur et al. (2022) emphasise that choosing such methods depends on the study objectives.

Marshall (2011) separates grounded theory, ethnography, and a case study from other qualitative methods. The author believes that they are major research strategies. Creswell (2014) gives a brief insight into each of these methods, stating that grounded theory is a field of sociology; ethnology is derived not only from anthropology but also from sociology; and case studies are not limited to specific fields but can be used in various fields.

Furthermore, according to Creswell (2014), interviews and qualitative case studies are the principal methods for qualitative approaches. Creswell (2014) states that open-ended questions are the fundamental elements of interviews. He suggests that case studies can be conducted where there is a need for an in-depth analysis of a case under study (Creswell, 2014). Indeed, this study was not a part of sociology, anthropology or case study but investigated a particular phenomenon related to organisations using literature review method. The literature review as a method is discussed in the subsequent section.

3.8.2 Literature review method

This section discusses the literature review as a method, while focusing more specifically on three different types: ***semi-systematic reviews*** (Liberati, et al., 2009), ***meta-analysis*** (Snyder, 2019), and an ***integrative literature review*** (Awan, et al., 2022).

A literature review (LR) is well-equipped to state the research problems in the context of this study, especially, the unknown factors enabling and challenging OP and sustainability, as well as the undefined steps for sustainability integration into OP, the vague phases for sustainability implementation in OP, and the equivocal approaches for sustainability balance in OP (Polit & Beck, 2004). The LR dealt with two areas of an interdisciplinary, namely management and sustainable development (Snyder, 2019).

There are three types of literature reviews, namely semi-systematic, systematic, and integrative reviews (Snyder, 2019). Systematic reviews, meta-analysis or integrative reviews with specific guidelines for management or business studies are included in various literature reviews (Frade, et al., 2021). Semi-systematic reviews consider the evolution of studies within a selected field and across research traditions (Snyder, 2019). A systematic review methodically identifies and critically evaluates relevant studies to collect and analyse data from the findings (Liberati, et al., 2009). A systematic literature review helps determine the extent to which a topic has been addressed in previous studies.

There are three ways of conducting a literature review as mentioned above, systematic reviews, meta-analysis, and integrative review (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). According to Wu and Lederer (2009) such reviews deal with the application of statistical procedures (Russell, 2004;). In addition, the below subsection discusses the ILR literature method selected for this study.

3.8.3 Integrative literature review method

This section discusses the ILR as the method employed in this study. Integrative reviews, semi-systematic reviews and systematic reviews are three different types of literature reviews, as described by Snyder (2019). The research method adopted for this qualitative thesis was an integrative literature review. This method was chosen to explore the diverse types of reviews used in the investigation of sustainability and OP of SA SMEs (Snyder, 2019).

An integrative literature review was relevant in this instance because it helped to remain focused on the topic and the context of the research. Furthermore, it facilitated a deeper understanding of the topic and its context by breaking down a broad topic to collect adequate and relevant information. This type of review was, therefore, suitable, as it provided this study with structured content tools to manage a rapidly growing area of research that appears to lack sufficient coverage (Torraco, 2016). An integrative review assists in filling this gap.

The integrated literature review (Torraco, 2005; Yorks, 2008) method was chosen as the primary lens to synthesise various streams of literature on sustainability and OP of South African SMEs (Shuck, 2011). There is little available guidance to write the tactics of an integrative literature review (Russell, 2004), however, the four steps followed were designing, conducting, analysing and writing the review (Snyder, 2019). It is important to note that some

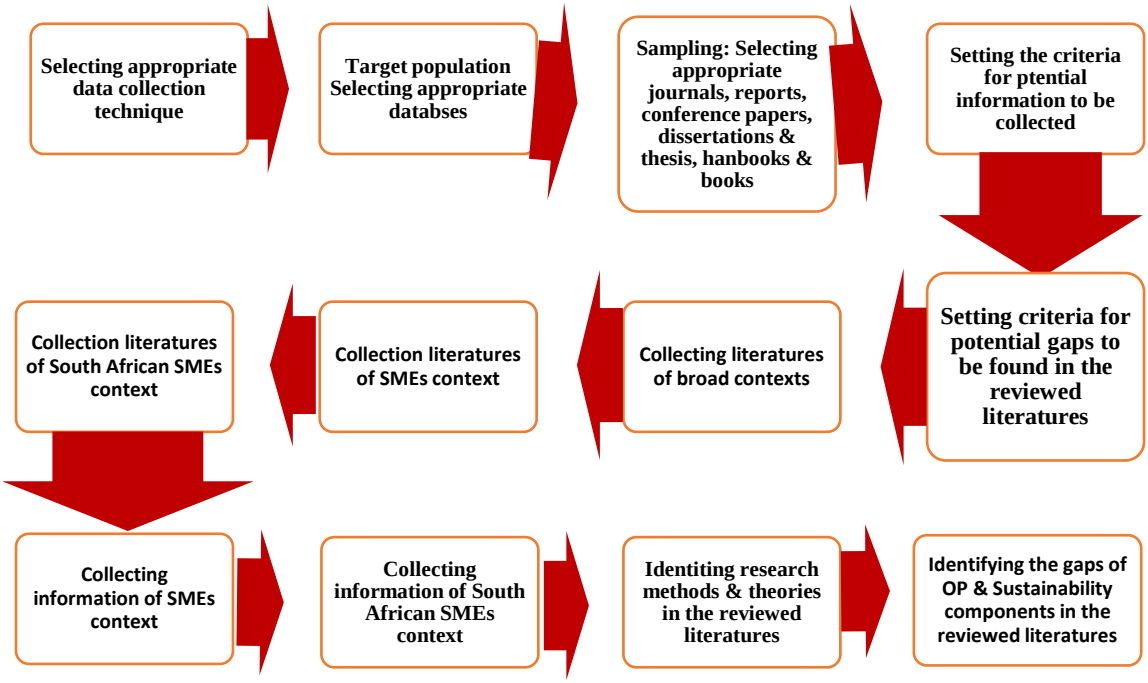
other steps were deemed necessary for this study and were applied as mentioned in the sections 3.9 to 3.18 in this chapter.

As a literature review, this study scrutinised, critiqued, and created representative literature on sustainability and OP within South African SMEs in an integrated manner to produce novel frameworks and perspectives (Awan, et al., 2022). The supportive methodical review of the literature conducted in this study reduced the bias in detecting, choosing, and assessing relevant reading materials (Cooper, et al., 2019). The orderly review used in this study enabled a better understanding of previous studies on sustainability and OP of SA SMEs (Awan, et al., 2022). According to Stevens (2001) and Russell (2004), such reviews require a summary of evidence. For this reason, each piece of literature reviewed in this study was summarised according to its objective, method adopted, and findings.

In this study, the integrative literature review (ILR) on sustainability and OP of SA SMEs was effectively and well-conducted as a research method (Snyder, 2019). The purpose of this ILR was used like any other research methodology to explore, synthesise and assess the current state of scholarly studies on sustainability and OP of South African SMEs (Schryen, et al., 2015) as a suitable research method (Bowen, 2009). This type of review was, therefore, suitable for this study, as it provided the researcher with the tools to manage a rapidly growing area of research (Torraco, 2016) that had limited coverage. An integrative review assists in filling this gap.

The review of literature conducted on sustainability and OP of SMEs offered an all-inclusive synthesis and interpretation specifically from the body of management and business knowledge (Schryen, et., 2015). An integrative literature review was relevant in this instance and helped maintain focus on the topic and the context of this study. It facilitated a deeper understanding of the topic and its context by breaking down a broad topic into context to collect adequate and relevant information. The summary of how the ILR was employed in this study is demonstrated in Figure 3.1 (below).

Figure 3.1: Summary of the integrative literature review process



Source: Author's own

The above figure summarises the 12 steps used in the ILR in this study. The next section discusses the eligibility criteria observed in this study.

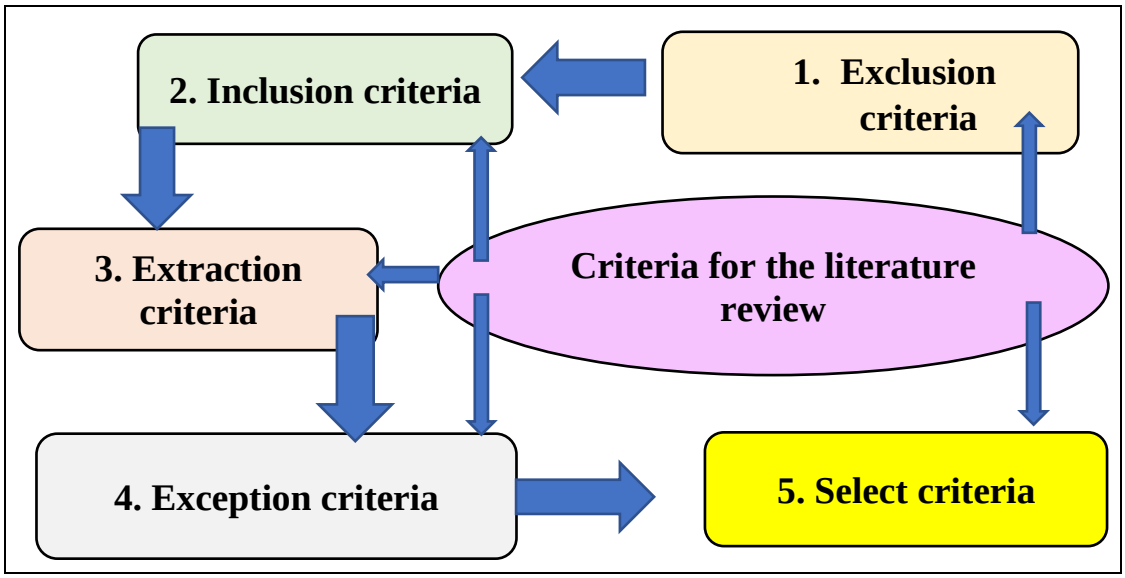
3.8.4 Eligibility criteria

This section debates the eligibility criteria that allowed the ILR to be conducted effectively. A literature review methodology cannot be conducted without norms that guide its implementation. Therefore, it is important to establish criteria (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021) to collect suitable literature for a study. In an integrative literature review, such principles are known as the eligibility criteria as one of the components of the review process (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Snyder, 2019).

According to Liberati et al. (2009), there is no standard process for selecting previously published studies to be contained in a systematic review. However, eligibility criteria were important as they helped demonstrate the credibility of the study's findings. Preliminary inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to select the journals (Figure 3,2 below). There are criteria to consider when conducting a literature review methodology, which assist

in deciding the appropriate literature to be considered for the review. Figure 3.2 displays five criteria for an effective literature review methodology based on the research objectives identified in Section 1.6.

Figure 3.2: Eligibility criteria for the literature review



Source: Author's own

Figure 3.2 shows the five criteria determined for the eligibility of the literature reviewed, specifically ***exclusion*** (Gegenfurtner, et al., 2009; Lewis, et al., 2011; Trigg, et al., 2018; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). The ***inclusion and exclusion criteria*** helped determine relevant primary sources (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). In this study three other criteria were added for the review, such as ***extraction criteria*** (Smith, et al., 2009; Bevillard-Charrière, et al., 2021) and likewise, ***exception criteria*** and ***selection criteria***.

3.8.5 Exclusion criteria

This section focuses on the exclusion criteria and lists all general elements but particularly OP and sustainability that led to the exclusion of literature from the review (Snyder, 2019), such as publication outlets (Clemmensen, et al., 2010), geographically focused articles (Sellitto, 2018), and diversity of journal publications (Sellitto, 2007). The impact of excluding certain studies was well assessed (Liberati, et al.2009) before proceeding with the data collection.

Therefore, literature with an unclear purpose, poor quality, unclear and unreasonable arguments or not focused on OP and sustainability, sustainability and OP in any SMEs or SA SMEs were excluded (Smith, et al., 2009; Snyder, 2019). The exclusion criteria for this study are detailed in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: Exclusion criteria for the literature review

Nr	Exclusion criteria	Description of the exclusion criteria
01	**Keywords**	Any keywords not mentioned in the list of the inclusion criteria
02	**Name of journal**	Any journal that was not related to Management, Business, Business Management, Entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises
03	**Year of publication**	Any publication from 2016
04	**Purpose of the reviewed literatures**	Not related to the topic
		Not related to any of the research objectives
		Not related to any component of the conceptual framework
05	**Bias of the reviewed literatures**	Not biased toward theme of this study
06	**Corresponding background information**	Not focused on any themes
07	**Corresponding topics**	Not focused on any specific topics or sub-topics
08	**Duplication of the reviewed literature**	Any duplication of the journal

Source: Author's own

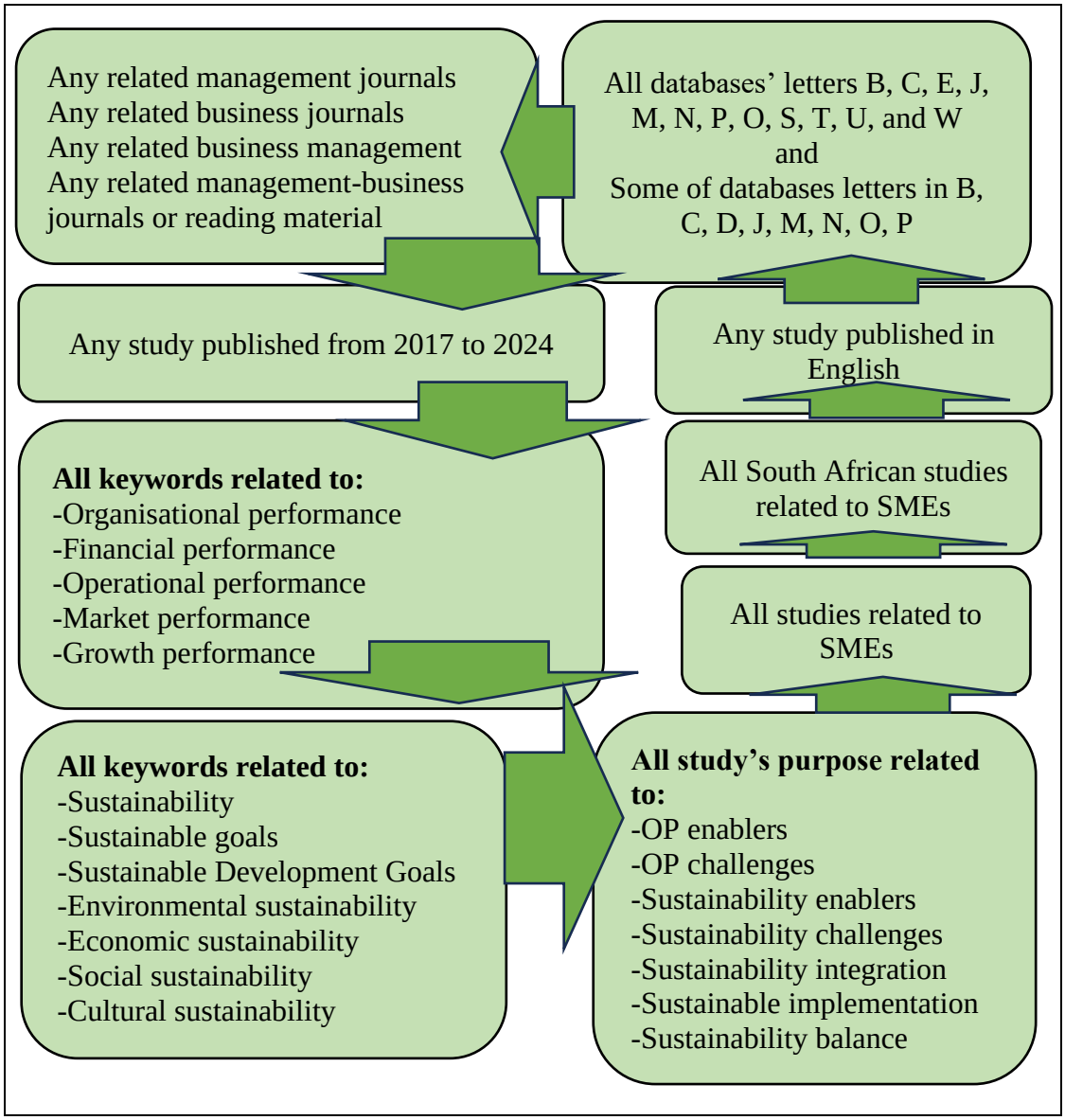
The above table demarcated all criteria for the exclusion of literature during the data collection process. The demarcation was done according to keywords, journal name, year of publication, topic, purpose of the reviewed literature, bias of reviewed literature, corresponding background information, corresponding topics, and duplication of the reviewed literature. The next section discusses the inclusion criteria.

3.8.6 Inclusion criteria

This section discusses the inclusion criteria of the elements that led to the inclusion of literature for this review. It should be noted that not all included literature was selected for further discussion, gap identification or compiling an agenda. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) suggest the inclusion of databases used in the integrative review. To meet the requirements of an integrative literature review, the study conducted a literature search to select articles for ***inclusion*** (Snyder, 2019).

The search began with the retrieval of articles on the sustainability and organisational performance of SMEs from the online library of the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The electronic resources listed alphabetically by title were used. The criteria for the inclusion of the literature during the data collection process were determined as in Figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4: Inclusion criteria for the literature review



Source: Author's own

The above figure demarcates all criteria for the inclusion of literature during the data collection process. The demarcation of the sources was the reading materials or name of journal, OP related keywords, sustainability-related keywords, year of publication, database, language, literature on SMEs, literature on SA SMEs, topic, and purpose of the reviewed literature. The next section discusses the extraction criteria.

3.8.7 Extraction criteria

This section's discussion is related to the extraction criteria. It was very difficult to predict whether articles were relevant or not before examining the reading material online. Some reading material was extracted after the analysis as it was irrelevant. The extraction criteria are displayed in Figure 3.5 below. According to Sellitto (2018) and Bevillard-Charrière et al., (2021), examination of subgroups should not be reported, since not all literature reviewed was discussed for further gap identification and analysis.

Although some were presented in the collected literature list, they were abstracted before the discussions of the findings took place. For this reason, some literature was extracted from the discussions after the sourcing process. They were extracted from identifying the gaps and drawing the research agenda.

In this study, some literature was extracted from the discussions for the following reasons:

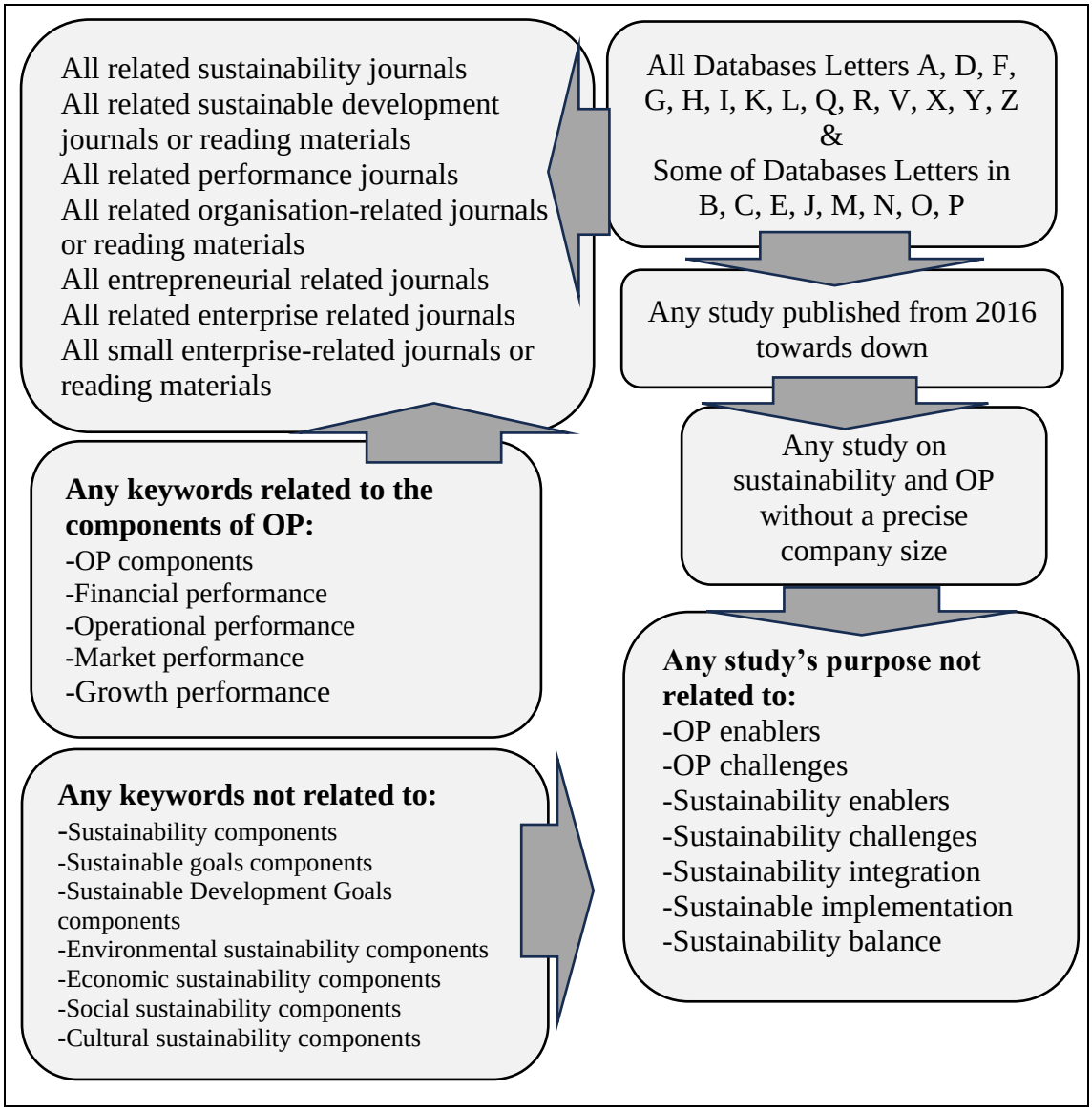
- The contents did not respond to the research questions of the study
- The size of the firm was not mentioned
- The literature included other SME sectors than SA SMEs
- The literature was duplicated
- The lack of a full document and the available abstract did not provide the answer to the enquiries of the study

The exception criteria are debated in the subsequent section.

3.8.8 Exception criteria

This section debates the exception criteria of this study. This study falls in the management field. Therefore, managerial-related reading material was considered. However, some reading materials were also considered given their relationship to the topic. The exception criteria for this study are detailed in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5: Exception criteria for the literature review



Source: Author's own

The contents of the above figure are the demarcation of the exception criteria of the reading material collection. In the above figure, all sources of literature related to the topic of this study were considered. Similarly, any components of OP, FP, OPP, MP and GP, as well as sustainability dimension components were also considered. Literature with a related purpose to this study was considered. The subsequent section deals with the selection criteria.

3.8.9 Selection criteria

In this section, the selection criteria involved with all the literature that fell within the inclusion criteria were discussed. Likewise, the literature related to the SME sectors or/ and the SA SME context. The selection criteria referred to any literature selected for analysis, interpretation, discussions, gap identification, research agenda drawing and recommendations. Not all literature reviewed was examined and analysed. There was a specific selection made regarding the literature appropriate for review and analysis. The literature collection technique is discussed in the succeeding section.

3.9 LITERATURE COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

This section discusses the technique used to collect literature in this study. Desk review or desk search was the technique used for the data collection from 2017 to 2024 from the selected databases available on Wits online library. Literature was selected following themes relative to the study topic, the research objectives and conceptual framework components (Sileyew, 2019). After the desk review, the next step was to target literature for the study.

3.10 TARGET LITERATURE PROCESS

This study targeted a population of 5000 publications of reading materials published between 2017 to 2024.

This section discusses how the literature was targeted for this study. Before targeting the population for this study, certain steps were followed as explained below. This section might be considered a guideline to outline the process followed to gather literature from the Wits library online resources. From this stage, the data collection mechanisms were developed and prepared with detailed procedures. The next section explains how to navigate the e-resources of the online library.

3.10.1 Navigating the e-resources of the online library

This section describes the navigation of the online library resources for this study. Navigating the Wits library online resources (or e-resources) was the first step before targeting the population. This was largely centred around selecting the appropriate databases online. Thus, the e-resources of the Wits library were visited virtually. There were seven items falling under e-resources, notably databases, e-journals, libGuides, WIReDSpace and WIReDSpace-Extra, past examination papers, digital archives and free COVID e-resources. Table 3.2 shows the components of Wits library's e-resources:

Table 3.2: Components of Wits e-resources online library

Number	Items	Observation
01	Databases	Considered
02	E-journals	Not considered
03	LibGuides	Not considered
04	WIReDSpace and WIReDSpace-Extra	Not considered
05	Past exam papers	Not considered
06	Digital archives	Not considered
07	Free COVID e-resources	Not considered

Source: Author's own

The above table shows that databases were the only e-resources selected as these are the relevant platforms to collect various materials that allowed for the methodical review of literature. In like fashion, the navigation from A to Z in the e-resource databases is discussed in the following section.

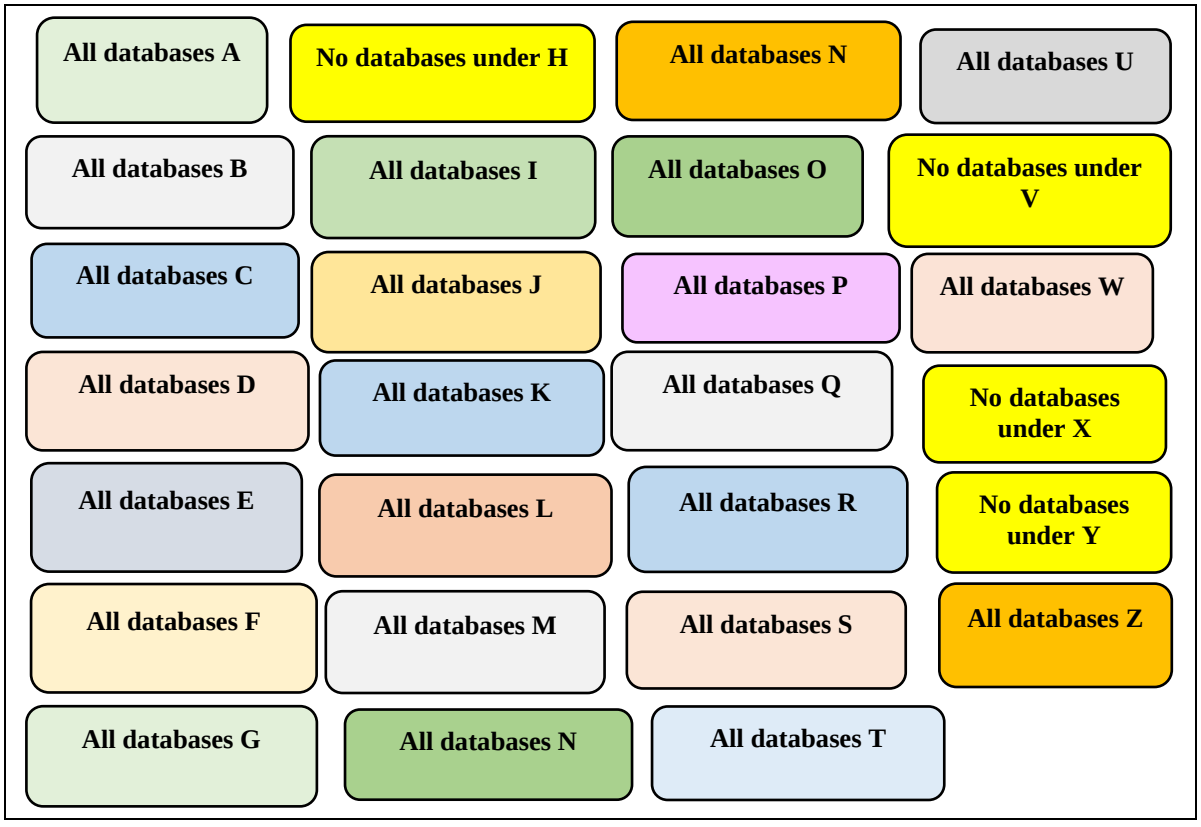
3.10.2 Navigating all the databases from A-Z

This section presents the online navigation from A to Z. The reader's capability to assess the database appropriateness requires the identification and incorporation of concepts into an integrative review (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Soares, 2014; Cronin & George, 2023). Therefore, concepts relative to this study were integrated into the literature review. Such integration allowed us to understand these concepts relative to the phenomena under study, which is sustainability and OP of SMEs in the context of South Africa.

The e-resources databases were navigated from A-Z (Gegenfurtner, et al., 2009). This allowed for the identification of relevant and irrelevant databases for this study. A detailed list of Wits' e-resources of the databases A-Z is presented in Appendix A. Some databases were included and others excluded, depending on their use in this study. These included multidisciplinary databases and peer-reviewed scholarly journals that provided full-text access to the journals.

Figure 3.7 below shows the all-encompassing target population. Descriptions of these databases are presented in Appendix A, which provides all databases included in the study, as well as those excluded from this study. There was no database under letters **H, V, X** and **Y.**

Figure 3.5: Target literature population= e-resources databases of Wits online library



Source: Author's own

The above figure shows 26 available databases of e-resources databases of Wits online library. Out of 26 databases, 4 did not have databases. The selection of required databases is discussed in the following section.

3.10.3 Selection of appropriate databases

This section details the approach of selecting suitable data for this study. After navigating the e-resources databases of Wits online library as discussed above, certain databases relevant to the study were selected. The figure below exhibits all the databases selected for this study. The reason for its selection is explained in **Appendix A.** The following are the components of figure 3.6.

- Blackwell Reference Online,
- Directory of Open Access journals,
- JSTOR,
- JSTOR Open Access books,
- Nexis-Uni,
- ProQuest Asian Business and Reference,
- ProQuest European Business,
- ProQuest Social Science journals,
- Sabinet Open Access journal collection,
- SAGE journals,

- ScienceDirect,
- SpringerLink,
- Routledge/Taylor & Francis and
- Wiley.

Figure 3.6: A board with the selected databases

Source: Author's own

The above board presents all the databases selected for this study. It is assumed they all contain sources acceptable for the managerial studies. A list of the databases selected include: Blackwell Reference Online, Directory of Open Access journals, JSTOR, JSTOR Open Access books, Nexis-Uni, ProQuest Asian Business and Reference, ProQuest European Business, ProQuest Social Science journals, Sabinet Open Access journal collection, SAGE journals, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Routledge/Taylor & Francis and Wiley. After selecting the databases, the selection of the literature was also important as explained below.

3.10.4 The selected literature

This section explains how the literature was selected. The possible representatives of the total population or literature form the selected respondents (Kothari, 2004; Chigbu, et al., 2023). This qualitative study based on the literature review has the e-resources of Wits library as the main population or universe. The research questions were answered from the collected literature, which were considered the respondents of this study. In an ILT, literature might be considered as the respondents of the investigation. The census enquiry is discussed in the subsequent section.

3.10.5 Census enquiry

This section discussed the census enquiry applied in this study. A census enquiry can be defined as a complete enumeration of all items in the population (Kothari, 2004). However, it is impossible to have every element of the population scrutinised (Kothari, 2004). At the same time, adequate correct findings can be attained only from a part of the total population under study (Kothari, 2004; Skinner, 2018).

To avoid any form of inadequate findings, all items characterising an e-resource database were considered. Therefore, the description of the databases names, sub-databases, limitations of the search for results, document types, content types, browser sources, browser content, source types, publication types, article types, journal by discipline, browser by discipline, journals, subjects or topics were considered to have satisfactory accurate outcomes in this study. ***Appendix A and Appendix B*** exhibit these characteristics. The next section discusses the attainment accuracy.

3.10.6 Highest accuracy attainment

This section addresses the question of high accuracy in ILR. The attainment of the highest accuracy happens when all elements of the study are covered (Kothari, 2004; Breadmore & Carroll, 2021). For this reason, all elements related to the databases, such as databases names, sub-databases, limitations of the results search, document types, content types, browser sources, browser content, sources types, publication type, article types, journal by discipline, browser by discipline, journals, subjects, or topics. were considered.

In line with the above, to reach the highest accuracy of all, the information related to the research objectives and questions that popped up during the search were considered. Likewise, the study reviewed the keywords, context, purpose, research methodology, theories and identified concepts retrieved from the collected literature. In addition, the cross-section of the literature is explained in the subsequent section.

3.10.7 Cross-section of a literature

This section describes the cross-section applied to the literature conducted in this study. To produce a small cross-section of the study, the selected reading materials represented the total literature (Kothari, 2004). These databases were reviewed (***Appendix A)*** to select those suitable for this study. Therefore, to produce a small cross-section, the population was trimmed into three groups, namely ***Target Literature Group A, Target Literature Group B*** and ***Target Literature Group C***. The total population of Wits library e-resources was represented by the selected databases, documents or source types and the list of Journals included in the databases which is presented in the section below.

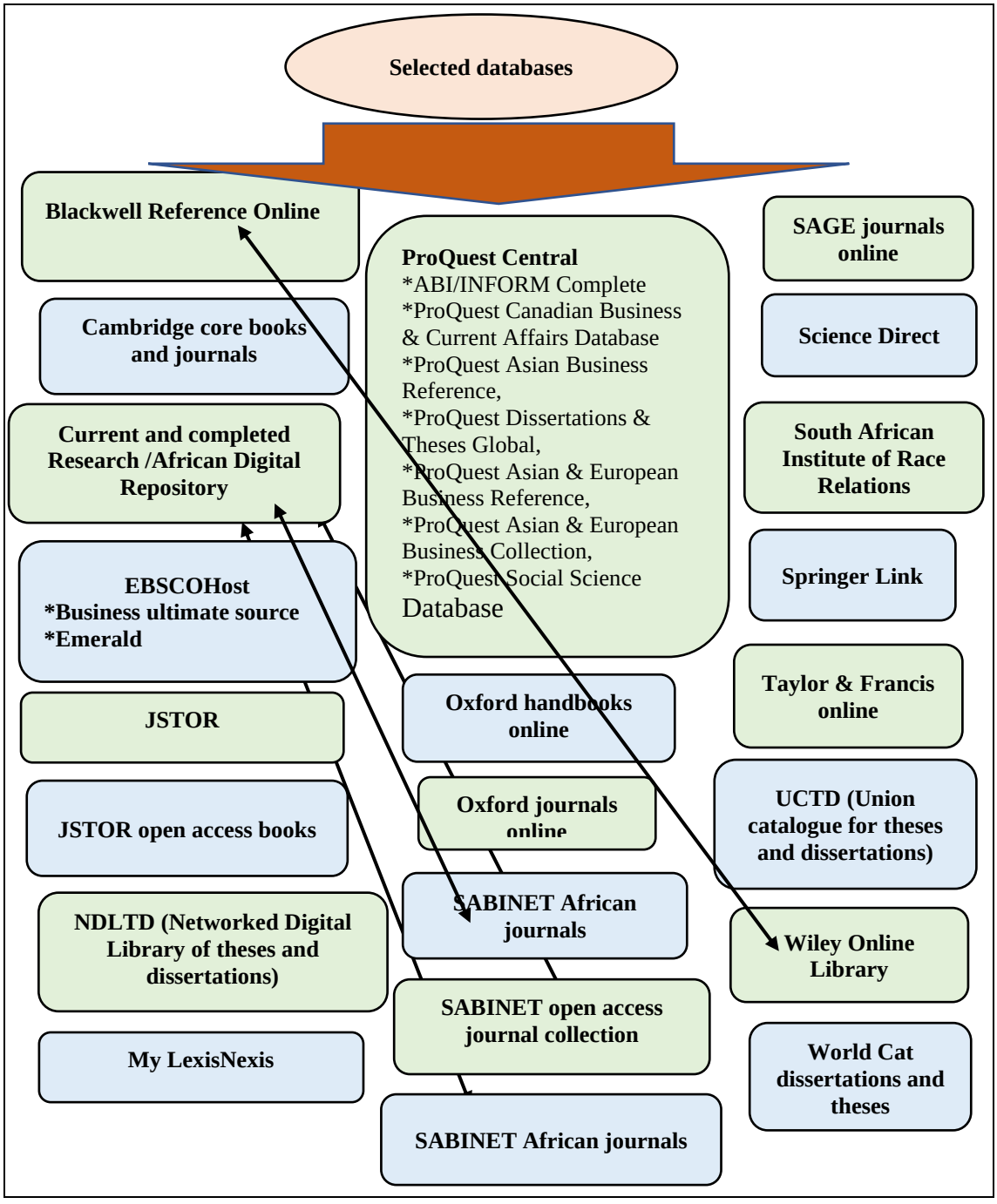
3.10.8 Target Literature Group A: Selected databases

This section discusses the targeted literature for this study. According to Kothari (2004), a population or universe encompasses all items in any field of investigation. In this study, the literature represented the target population following the rule of the characteristics of the population under study (Kothari, 2004). The databases appropriate to this study were selected from the e-resources databases. They were selected following the criteria: databases name, sub-databases, limitations of the results search, document types, content types, browser sources,

browser content, source types, publication type, article types, journal by discipline, browser by discipline, journals, and subjects or topics which were considered as the characteristics of the population under study.

This study selected the University of the Witwatersrand' s library e-resources databases that deal with management, business management and entrepreneurship studies. The study selected these sources that contained information regarding sustainability and OP of SMEs in general and South African SMEs in particular. They were gathered to respond to the research question attributes (Ragab & Arisha, 2018) and to achieve the research objectives of the study. The details regarding the selected databases are exhibited in Appendix A. Figure 3.7 provides a summary of the selected databases suitable for this study.

Figure 3.7: Target Literature Group A: Selected Databases



Source: Author's own

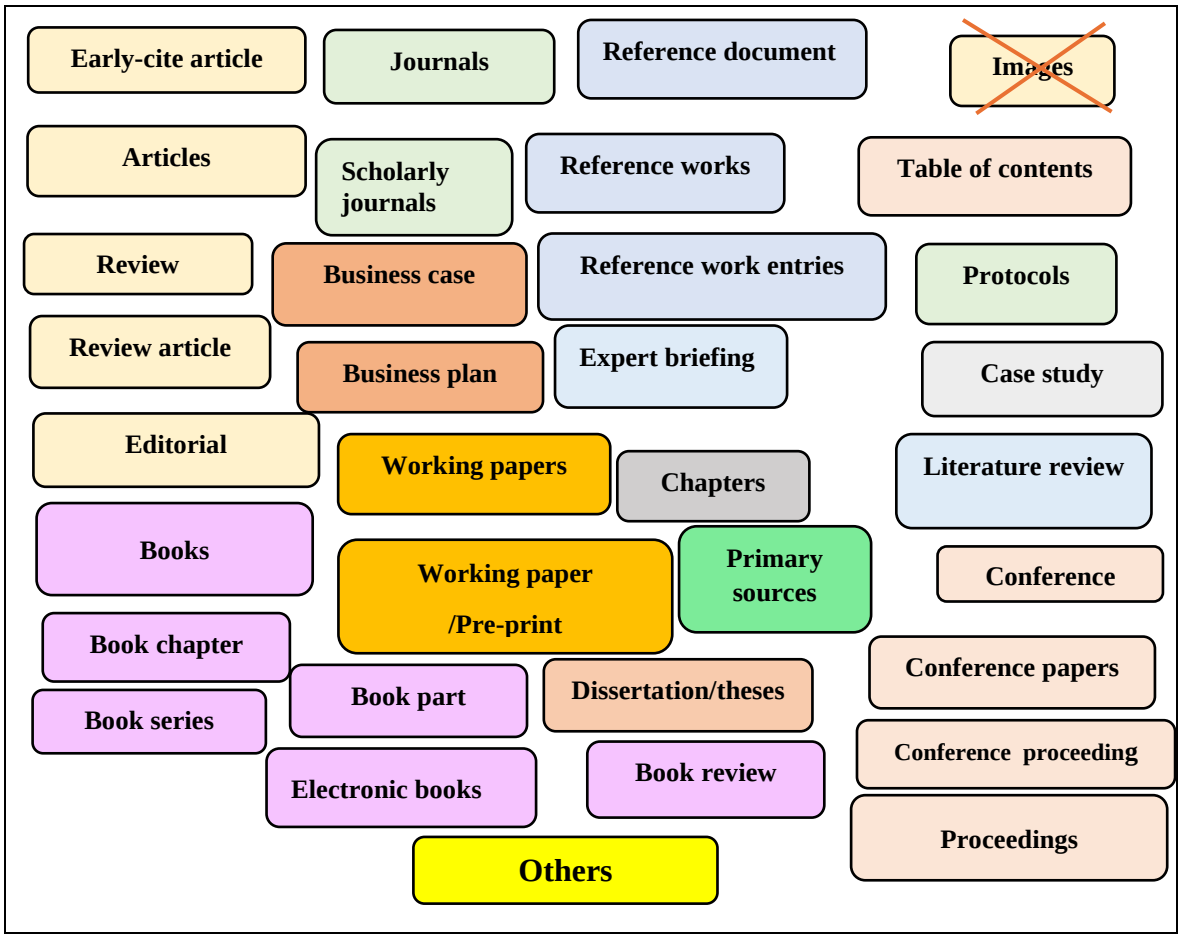
The above figure provides all the collected online databases from the overall 22 selected for this study. Some were linked; to explain, every search on Blackwell Reference Online database led to Wiley Online Library. Likewise, every search on Current & Completed Research /African Digital Repository database led to SABINET Open Access Journal Collection and

SABINET African Journals. Target literature Group B is described in further detail in the following section.

3.10.9 Target Literature Group B: Documents or source types

This section describes target Literature Group B, which included documents or source types. The comprehensive integrative reviews of this study included reading materials conducted with different samples (Cooper, 1998; Russell, 2004), such as articles, journals, conference papers, reports, dissertations, theses, handbooks, and books as exhibited below.

Figure 3.8: Target Literature Group B: Documents or source types



Source: Author's own: Inspired from the databases displayed in the e-resources of in the University of the Witwatersrand online library

The above figure shows 33 types of documents or sources considered for the collection of the literature for the review for this study. This was helpful in expanding the possibility of getting a large amount of reading material for the potential of providing relevant responses to the research questions formulated in Chapter 1. However, the collection of images was not needed in this study. The sampling of the literature is discussed below.

3.11 LITERATURE SAMPLING AND COLLECTION PROCESS

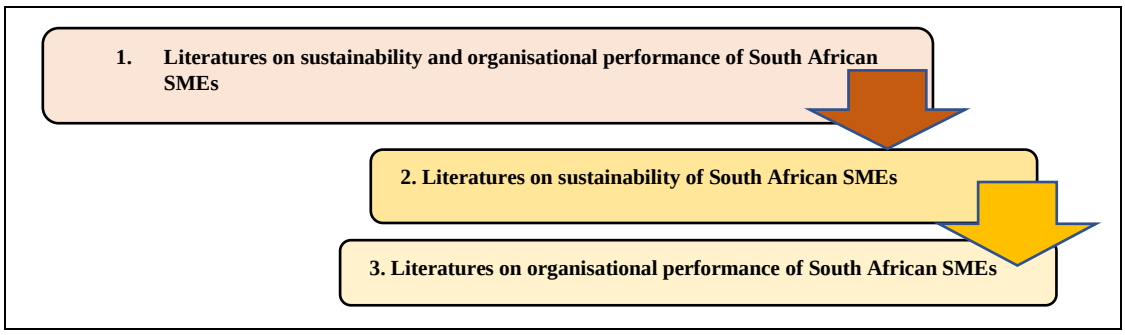
This section discusses the literature collection approach adopted in this study. In an ILR, the data collection process of secondary data is similar to primary ones (Kumar, 2018). This study followed the process required to determine the type of information needed for this study (Kumar, 2018) which was to adequately answer the research questions about OP and sustainability in SMEs and SA SMEs.

The section provides the process followed for the sampling and the collection of literature. These two are discussed simultaneously since the method, like an ILR, the sampling process and data collection can be combined or done at the same time. Sampling allowed for the collection of appropriate and relevant reading materials. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) suggested that any sampling decision must be justified and explained. Therefore, the following subsections provide the selected sampling strategies and justify the choices.

3.11.1 Sampling Frame 1: Sampling of key topic literature review

This section explains the sampling frame for the literature review. In this study, the sampling methodology was identified using the keywords of the study, which improved the evaluation of the database (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) and the data collection per subtopic.

Figure 3.9: Sampling frame of the key-topic literature review



Source: Author's own

Figure 3.11 (above) shows how the literature was initially sampled. To collect the literature regarding OP, the study initially searched for answers from the literature focused on OP of SMEs and South African SMEs. Answers regarding sustainability in SMEs and South African SMEs were searched for in literature on the sustainability of SMEs and South African SMEs.

The search for the answers of sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs was from literature based on sustainability and organisational performance of South African SMEs. However, such searches did not help much in finding relevant answers to the research questions. The above figure shows the overall sampling strategy of the literature. The first one helped to collect data related to RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5, while the second and third helped to collect data related to RQ1 and RQ2. After the completion of this step, the study moved to the next step, which was labelled as purposive literature sampling.

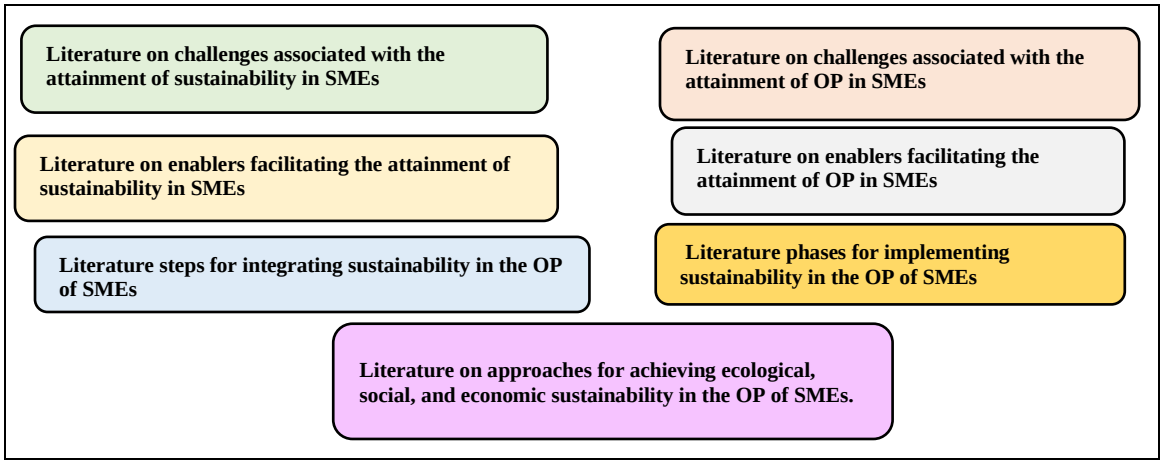
3.11.2 Sampling Frame 2: Purposive literature sampling

This section discusses the purposive sampling applied to the literature review conducted in the study. Furthermore, to comply with Whittemore and Knafl's (2005) suggestion, this study combined purposive sampling strategies with a wide-ranging search appropriate for its purpose (Broome, 1993).

In the purposive literature sampling stage, first, the literature was searched according to the research objectives, and later sampled accordingly. In other words, the study reviewed whether the purpose of the selected literature would correspond to the objectives of this study or answer

any of the research questions in this study. Therefore, Figure 3.10 (below) displays the purposive literature sampling approach.

Figure 3.10: Sampling per literature purposes



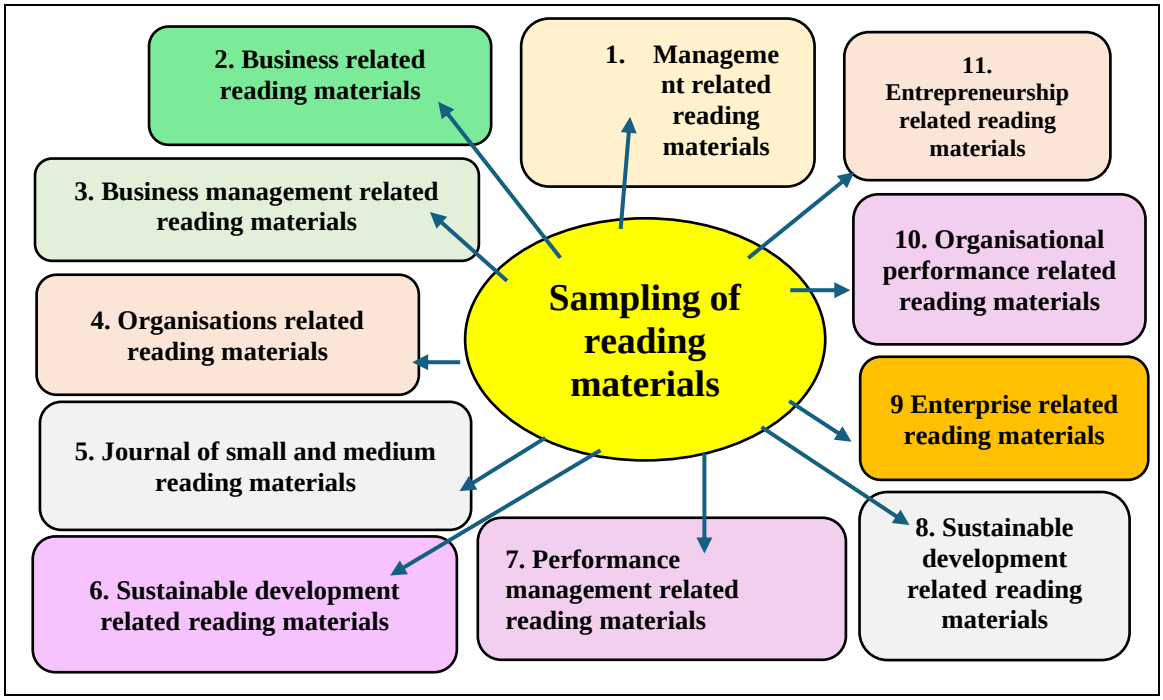
Source: Author's own

The above figure shows the sampling of the purposes corresponding to each research objective of this study. This stage allowed for the collection of literature to answer the research objectives and questions adequately for this study. However, to ensure that the literature answers fitted the field of management and the topic of this study, it was necessary to sample the list of reading materials to be reviewed as discussed below.

3.11.3 Sampling Frame 3: Sampling of reading materials

This section discusses the type of reading materials considered for the data collection, with the details displayed in Figure 3.11 below.

Figure 3.11: Sampling frame of the related reading materials



Source: Author's own

The above figure displays the type of reading material selected for the data collection. Note, it was difficult to sample the selected reading material regarding the numbers given, as each fell into countless related reading material. The most important criteria in the collection of the literature review were the quality of the sources, rather than the numbers of material collected. The subsequent section focuses on the literature search and collection.

3.11.4 Literature search and collection

This section is devoted to the search and collection of the literature. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) suggested including the strategies used in the integrative review. The study used each formulated research question as the key search theme to find relevant answers from relevant literature. Below is a list of the seven search themes used:

1. OP enablers in SMEs and SA SMEs
2. OP challenges in SMEs and SA SMEs
3. Sustainability enablers in SMEs and SA SMEs

4. Sustainability challenges enablers in SMEs and SA SMEs
5. Implementation phases of sustainability the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs
6. Integration steps of sustainability of the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs
7. Approaches for sustainability balance of the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs

It was observed that the data collection process required flexibility and adaptability from the researcher. A literature review method is not a mathematical study but the method is static and cannot change. The most important criteria were to collect literature from relevant sources that first, fitted the field of management (included business, business management, management and business, and business and management related sources). Second, sources related to the study topic (such as organisations, enterprises, entrepreneurial and small enterprises) to fit the SME context of sustainability or sustainable development related-reading materials identified to include the sustainability phenomenon in the study, and organisations' performance and performance related sources, such as journals, articles, conference papers, books, handbooks, reports, theses, and dissertations. This was deemed sufficient for conducting this study and collecting the appropriate literature. The content terms search in the integrative review is discussed in the following section.

3.11.5 Content terms search in the integrative review

This section discusses the content terms that were searched in the literature. This study was focused on sustainability and OP. To ensure that the research questions were answered accordingly, the search for the content terms were identified. They were the components of the two phenomena under study. This allowed to remain in the context of the study. The below table exhibited the selected key terms searched in the review.

Table 3.3: Content terms search in the integrative review

Nbr	Key search components of OP	Key search components of sustainability
01	Financial performance or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)	Environmental sustainability or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)

02	Financial performance or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)	Environmental sustainability or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)
03	Financial performance or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)	Environmental sustainability or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)
04	Financial performance or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)	Environmental sustainability or any related aspect or component (in SMEs & SA SMEs)

Source: Author's own

The above shows OP dimensions and sustainability dimensions as the terms searched for in the literature. Aligned with the listed components of each OP dimension in Chapter 2 Section 2.2, and similarly in Section 2.3, each sustainability perspective and its related component dimension is itemised. The above table is based on this alignment of all the OP and sustainability dimensions and their related components that were searched and identified in the literature during the reviewing and examination process. This assisted in keeping the study on track relative to the phenomenon under study and collecting relevant information with the potential of answering the research questions, regarding both OP and sustainability. The next section provides the number of literature publications collected for this study.

3.11.6 The number of literature publications collected for data analysis

In this section, the number of literature publications collected is indicated. Jadad et al. (1998) and Conn et al., (2003b) suggested a maximum of suitable primary sources for a comprehensive search for an integrative review; which for this study was identified as 5000 for the ILR which was a mono-study. It was convenient to identify a large appropriate primary source to ensure the adequacy and consistency of the findings. Furthermore, the literature related to the study was collected following the selected databases, the appropriate discipline, type of sources and journal names before proceeding with the inclusion, exclusion, exception, extraction, and selection criteria. In the next section, an explanation is provided regarding how all the gathered literature was managed and analysed.

The data collection and analysis were a tricky process. To explain, searching literature based on the keywords and looking for those keywords in the literature was the appropriate way of searching appropriate literature. Similarly, searching the literature, based on the keywords, was not a guarantee to obtain relevant literature. Some literature shared the same keywords as those in this study but would not be suitable to answer the research questions in this study. In the same way, many studies, regardless of the similarity of the established keywords with those in this study, did not fit the company small size required in this study. Even worse, in numerous literature publications, respective keywords did not appear in the article abstract, and not even in the title. Thus, it was pointless to consider them for review as they would be unable to fulfil the enquiries of this study.

Consistent with the above concerns, it was difficult to find studies, based on SMEs, by looking at the topic, abstracts, and keywords. Finally, ***5000 reading materials*** were collected. Most of the context of the reviewed literature did not appear in the titles, abstracts, and keywords but within the texts, and more precisely, in the research methodology section. There were also many publications without keywords. Therefore, although this study established its keywords, this was not enough to collect relevant data. Therefore, the keywords were not used as the *sine qua non* condition to consider relevance for reviewing. The integrative literature review was helpful in reviewing, criticising, and synthesising representative literature on sustainability and OP of SMEs, as well as generating new knowledge regarding topics relative to sustainability dimensions and OP dimensions of SMEs in general and particularly in the context of South Africa. The subsequent section deals with the management and analysis of the literature.

3.12 LITERATURE MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS PROCESS

This section discusses the management and analysis of the collected data. The 5000 collected publications were reviewed in detail. In the ILR, like the sampling and data collection process, the data management and analysis process were a simultaneous process. The subsection explains how data management and analysis worked in this current ILR. There was a need to manage the produced raw data before analysis (Boeije, 2009; Wahyuni, 2012).

The qualitative data were organised before using the inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Kyngäs, 2019).). Opening codes, creating categories and abstraction are three processes

of managing qualitative data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008), furthermore, they needed to be shortened, and managed without destroying their complexity and context (Mahajan, 2018). All these procedures are observed and explained below.

3.12.1 Manual literature storage

In this section, the manual storage of data was clarified. The collected literature was stored immediately after collection to safeguard the data before being lost. With the experience from this study, certain literature publications that were collected online were not correctly stored and were lost as they had been removed from the online database. This was a learning curve and after this was experienced it was decided to store all literature publications offline in categorised folders for future analysis.

Multiple folders were created and labelled for each research question of this study. Initially, seven files were created to store all the collected literature, and later, subfolders were created in each main folder corresponding to each research question. This was already part of the coding and categorisation stages of the IRL. The following section explains the preparation of the literature for analysis.

3.12.2 Literature preparation

This section explains how the literature was prepared for analysis. To manage rationally and adequately the literature during the preparation stage, diagrams or maps were designed to describe the scope of the literature review and the procedure for the literature collection, sampling, analysis, and reporting. The manual literature description was applied after the preparation of the literature.

3.12.3 Manual literature description

This section debates the manual description of the literature. Aligned with the five research questions of this study, each document was categorised according to any of the following: an enabler to fit ***Research Question 1***, as a challenge to fit ***Research Question 2***, as a phase to fit ***Research Question 3,*** as a step to fit ***Research Question 4*** and as an approach to fit ***Research***

Question 5 as they were sampled, described, analysed, and categorised in detail. The next section discusses manual literature transcription.

3.12.4 Manual literature transcription

This section discusses the manual transcription of the collected literature. The preliminary literature analysis phase involved the transcription (Wahyuni, 2012). For clarity, the first step was followed by re-reading each transcript of the collected literature (Alase, 2017). These processes helped decide the kind of literature that was to be included or excluded in the transcript (Wahyuni, 2012). For this reason, all the collected literature was transcribed (Zamawe, 2015) and incorporated into the previously developed codes in the transcript (Hennink et al., 2019).

Various tables were initially created to transcribe the literature for collection to achieve the research objectives and questions. Thereafter, tables were created corresponding to each literature review category. After the data collection was complete, all the collected literature was transcribed according to their relevant tables. Among the columns used in the table, there was a column appropriate for the transcribed literature, followed by the column for the excluded literature. This was done for each literature review category. The coded and categorised data are displayed in those transcripts.

Appendices in the form of tables were used for the following purposes: to capture or transcribe the collected literature (Callahan, 2010), to describe all information sources in the search, such as databases name, dates of the coverage, authors, reading material names, journal names, year of publication, keywords and titles of the literature (Liberati, et al., 2009), to organise literature in a clear and concise format (Ganong, 1987) as a means to keep track of the literature (Torraco, 2005); and to increase the ability of this study's reviewers to discover reliable information from all information sources (Russell, 2004). Furthermore, such instruments were used for the literature analysis (Pan, 2016). The next section explains the process of manual coding of the literature.

3.12.5 Manual coding approach used for the literature review methodology

This section describes the manual coding approach implemented in this study where precise coding identified literature (Wahyuni, 2012). This section clarified how the coding was processed. Thus, after storing the collected data in an offline external drive, after that, they were systematically organised. Furthermore, the collected literature relative to the topic, research objectives and those generated from the combination of the topic and conceptual framework components of the study were manually coded (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016).

First, open coding was applied to notes and headings made during the review of the literature (Elo & Kynga, 2008). Key topics and subkey topics, purposes and subpurposes, concepts and key concepts, theories and subtheories, themes and subthemes were part of the coding generated from the literature (Krippendorff, 2004). The manual coding and categorisation were done sequentially.

Furthermore, measuring consistency (Liberati, et al., 2009) is also a process of managing literature. Storing literature, transcribing audio sources, and cleaning the literature were the three important phases of managing literature in this qualitative study (Wahyuni, 2012). The description of literature management methods and merging the results of studies should be done (Liberati, et al., 2009). Thus, the subsequent section focuses on the manual categorisation done in this study.

3.12.6 Manual categorisation or theming the literature review methodology

This section provided details about the manual categorisation of this study. Simply, categorisation indicates the grouping of various categories generated from any research and typically follows the respective classes. Categorisation was among the phases of ***content analysis*** (Naganathan & Islam, 2015; Moon, et al., 2021; Gani, et al., 2023), ***thematic analysis*** (Yousif & Pessi, 2016; Makhdoom & Malik, 2018; Terason, 2021), and ***literature review methods*** (Dwertmann, 2021; Larranaga & Valor, 2022; Atalay, et al., 2022; Faisal, et al., 2022; Pasqualotto, et al., 2023). This demonstrates the importance of research categorisation in general and particularly the ILR as conducted in this study.

An amalgamation of literature clarified fundamental facets (Schryen, et al., 2015), such as corporate factors, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, sustainability and modernity factors related to OP and sustainability achievements and challenges. For the description of all content aspects, the written material regarding the review of all literature publication categories of this study were read several times (Elo & Kynga, 2008).

To reduce the number of categories, literature was grouped according to the research questions in Chapter 1 (Elo & Kynga, 2008) by breaking up analogous or dissimilar categories into wider higher order concepts (Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Dey 1993). After collecting the literature, the publications were grouped according to their respective literature review category, namely the factors of the key topic, purposive, conceptual, theoretical, thematic, and contextual literature review. This was followed by the grouping of excluded, included, excepted, extracted, duplicated, missing and selected literature related to those literature review categories. At the same time, similar or dissimilar data was grouped together.

The grouping categories listed under higher order headlines is the step after open coding (Elo & Kynga, 2008;). Categorising the gathered data was done during the analysis process in line with their applicable use (Wahyuni, 2012). There is a link between several identified categories and the central problem (Andrews, et al., 2012). In line with this, categories were not only related to the research problems but also to key topics and subkey topics, purposes and subpurposes, concepts and key concepts, theories and subtheories, themes and subthemes and were part of the categorisation generated from the literature (Krippendorff, 2004). The categorisation allowed the grouping of key concepts, purposive, conceptual, theoretical, thematic, and contextual literature reviews in terms of their year of publication, methodologies, and context. Manual puzzling is explained in the following section.

3.12.7 Manual puzzling

This section discusses the manual process of puzzling the collected literature, which was different from categorising, theming, and coding, considering that some studies dealt simultaneously with more than one factor. It provides information for various factors at the same time. Information was puzzled following the respective factors and aspects and discussed under each and respective objective. Furthermore, abstraction of the collected literature was the focus of the next section.

3.12.8 Literature abstraction

This section explains the abstraction of the literature. Abstraction can be defined as the formulation of a wide-ranging description of a research topic through category creation (Polit & Beck, 2009). The abstraction process is a procedure involving the creation of concepts in qualitative content analysis (Elo, et al., 2014). Usually, some aspects of the process can be readily described but it partially depends on the researcher's insight or intuitive action, which may be very difficult to explain to others (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Abstraction is a continuous procedure whenever it is rational and possible (Elo & Kynga, 2008). However, during the abstraction and condensation process, the meaning of the text may be lost (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Furthermore, fragmentation and meaning unit of the literature is discussed in the subsequent section.

3.12.9 Literature fragmentation and meaning unit

In this section, some details were offered about literature fragmentation and meaning unit. To completely capture the meaning of the problem, supplementary data should be added to a theme that is identified from the data but may not be detailed (Hennink, et al., 2019). Thus, this study listed themes, concepts, and theories to be identified in the literature review. These items were sufficiently explained in Chapter 2. However, additional themes, concepts and theories were identified from the reviewed literature for better notation of the research problems and objectives.

To avoid any fragmentation of the meaning of the collected literature, themes and concepts of each literature review category displayed were considered (available in **Appendices, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and L)**. Only data containing the themes and concepts or similar and synonym themes and concepts under investigation were collected. The following section demonstrates how the condensation and meaning unit was conducted.

3.12.10 Condensation and meaning unit

This section demonstrates the process of condensation and meaning unit of the current ILR. According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), condensation refers to the process of shortening the version of the text that still conveys the essential message of the meaning unit while keeping the core meaning and the central meaning intact. The details about literature grouping and condensing are provided below.

3.12.11 Literature grouping and condensing

In this section, the grouping and condensing of the literature was demonstrated. To reduce the number of categories, data should be grouped (Elo & Kynga, 2008) through the breaking up of analogous or dissimilar categories into a wider higher order (Burnard 1991). After collecting the data, all data were grouped according to their respective literature review category, namely the key topic, purposive, conceptual, theoretical, thematic, and contextual literature review. Followed by the grouping of excluded, included, excepted, extracted, duplicated, missing and selected literature related to those literature review categories, similarly, similar or dissimilar data were grouped. However, masquerading is another process explained in the section below.

3.12.12 Literature masquerading

This section discussed the masquerading of the literature. Data masquerading was found in some types of articles published before and after 2010 (Fusch & Ness, 2015). There was no need for masquerading or hiding the collected data. Whatever the outcome in the reviewed literature, all items were considered, grouped, analysed, and reported. Moreover, the data is published without manipulation to ensure good practice and transparency. Another aspect of the ILR included literature saturation, explained in the following section.

3.12.13 Literature saturation

This section addresses the issue of data saturation, applicable to other qualitative data enquiries. To avoid saturation, data were collected through the formulation of the requests during the searching process to ensure that the study was not saturated with irrelevant literature. Similarly,

it should be noted that the first four searches gave the same responses or listed the same literature publications. Similarly, the last three searches generated the same literature. No more than 10 literature publications mentioned the same thing. Also, gaps in the literature were identified only in SA SMEs literature.

Regarding the meaning of *saturation*, to meet the data saturation requirements of the integrative literature review, at least 1000 publications were selected per literature category predetermined at the beginning of the literature collection process. Moreover, literature was collected aligned to the research questions, main categories, followed by sub-subcategories to have accurate findings. The subsequent section defines the presentation of the collected literature.

3.12.14 Presentation of selected literature

This section discusses the presentation of the selected literature. All the publications of the selected literature for the data analysis were presented in tables with some details before the coding and categorisation processes. The abstraction of the literature is discussed below.

3.12.15 Literature abstraction

In this section, literature abstraction is explained in more detail. Abstraction can be defined as the formulation of a wide-ranging description of a research topic through the creation of categories (Polit & Beck 2004). The abstraction process is a procedure involving the creation of concepts in qualitative content analysis (Elo, et al.2014). Usually, some aspects of this process can be readily described, but it also depends on the researcher's insight or intuitive action, which may be very difficult to describe to others (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

The abstraction is a continuous procedure whenever it is rational and possible (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). To avoid this, the eligibility for data inclusion, exclusion, extraction, exception, and selection criteria was established before the data collection process took place During the preliminary literature review, several literature review categories were created in line with the key topic, research objectives, theoretical foundation, conceptual framework, thematic framework, and contextual framework.

Furthermore, the literature fragmentation and meaning unit are discussed in the next section. During the preliminary literature review, several literature review categories were created in line with the key topic, research objectives, theoretical foundation, conceptual framework, thematic framework, and contextual framework. This has facilitated a deeper understanding of the topic and its context by breaking down a broad topic into context to collect adequate and relevant information.

The integrative literature review method was selected for this study due to the necessity for a thoughtful investigation and understanding of literature, growing knowledge on sustainability dimensions, sustainable organisational performance dimensions, sustainable corporate governance, corporate sustainable responsibility, sustainable entrepreneurship behaviours, sustainable literacy, and sustainable SMEs. The visual representation of the literature is discussed in the next section.

3.12.16 Analysed literature: visual representation

This section discusses the visual representation of the analysed literature. Finally, during the analysis process, reports, queries, charts, graphs, tables, maps, and diagrams were created (Zamawe, 2015) for visual representations of the collected and analysed data with their associated findings. The visual representations were used for the selected databases, keywords, literature based on the topic, research objectives and conceptual framework themes (Morgan, 1997). Liberati et al. (2009) suggested the use of diagrams when describing the flow of information throughout the review process. This study used a variety of figures and tables to describe the findings and flow of information collected from the reviewed literature. Likewise, all reported results were presented using visual representation discussed below.

3.12.17 Presentation of findings

This section discusses the approach used to present the findings. This study presented all the information (Liberatiet al., 2009) collected and generated from the discussions of the findings. According to Whittemore and Knafl (2005) the integrative review can erroneously interpret data from primary sources. Thus, the findings of the ILR were presented in an organised manner (Liberati, et al., 2009) in line with each respective research question. Moreover, all the

collected information including both benefits and problems in the literature were provided for every finding considered in the review (Liberati, et al., 2009). Hence, information on enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability were provided especially in the discussion sections in Chapter 4.

This study had too many outcomes (Liberati, et al., 2009) for all the research questions. The volume of each finding is discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.3 and Section 4.4 for all the information included in a three-column table. The first column displayed all the literature that did not fall under SMEs or SA SMEs studies. The second column presented all the collected and reviewed literature on SMEs conducted in the rest of the world. The third column exhibited literature that included SA SME studies only (Liberati, et al., 2009).

Furthermore, all this information was provided as web appendices (Liberati et al., 2009). Likewise, all missing information was presented (Liberati, et al., 2009) in the appendices and mentioned in the discussions of the findings. Furthermore, in Appendices C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and L ***the name of the authors, year of publication, and the name of the journal were written in blue while various aspects of the findings were written in green***. Similarly, the visual representation of the findings is also explained in the following section.

3.12.18 Visual representation of findings

This section details how the findings are presented using visual design. This study collected literature from several large studies (Liberati, et al., 2009) following the research objectives and questions. Thus, all collected results were displayed under each created category to the examination of each study (Liberati, et al., 2009). Moreover, the findings are presented in tables while the analysis is represented in charts. Therefore, the following section discusses the interpretation of the literature.

3.13 INTERPRETATION OF THE LITERATURE

In line with the above discussion, this section discusses how the interpretation of the findings was done. Literature was interpreted in line with the presented and analysed literature review categories of this study. In this study, only literature related to SA SMEs was interpreted in the context of OP and sustainability (Liberati, et al., 2009) by referring to their components listed

in Chapter 2. Any findings in the literature review were discussed and interpreted in line with OP and sustainability dimensions and used for the identification of gaps in the reviewed literature. The focus of the next section is the identification of the gaps in the literature.

3.14 IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS IN THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explains how the gaps, but only for SA SMEs found in the reviewed literature, were identified. These were identified compared with findings from other reviewed SME literature. Furthermore, besides factors of OP and sustainability, those concepts were the basis for the collection of the literature content, the discussion of the findings, the identification of gaps in the reviewed literature, and the compilation of the recommendations, research agenda, and practical and managerial implications.

Besides, the integrative literature review aimed to support the continual growth of OP, and sustainability knowledge and literature, consequently, the future research area was also proposed based on the missing key concepts in the revised previous studies. The subsequent section discusses the research agenda.

3.15 COMPILING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

In line with the above discussions, this section explains the compiling of the research agenda. Liberati et al. (2009) suggest the implications for future research from the results of the LR. Thus, multiple research agendas were compiled only for SA SMEs from the gaps identified in the findings for each research question and compared with the findings of other SMEs. Like any other literature review, this started from broad concepts narrowed down to the SMEs and further to the context of SA SMEs. Only SMEs and SA SMEs were selected for the discussions, however, only SA SMEs were selected for the identification of gaps to compile the research agenda. Nevertheless, the true assessment for this study is explained below.

3.16 TRUSTWORTHINESS ASSESSMENT

This section evaluated the trustworthiness of this study. ontology, epistemology and methodology are spanned by a paradigm which is a world view (Bashir, et al. 2008). According

to Bashir et al. (2008), the quality of scientific study should be done within a paradigm and should be judged in terms of its own paradigm.

To ensure the truthfulness of the findings, the processes of content analysis and thematic analysis were reported accurately in Chapter 4 (Elo, et al., 2014). Similarly, the sampling frames and number of the collected literature were identified and are available in Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G H, I, J and K, and described accurately and mentioned in the findings (Elo, et al., 2014). The appropriateness of the selected databases is available in Appendix A. In addition, literature was selected according to the research topic, objectives, and the context of the study.

Furthermore, the collected information of both sustainability and OP reinforced the trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the truthfulness of the findings, information literature was collected even from the recent studies published in 2024. In addition, research findings were used to validate existing theories (Zhang & Wildemuth, 1996).

The integrative literature review conducted in this study integrated the appropriate theoretical foundation including the theory of knowledge to conduct the ILR and CT for theory development. Indeed, a review of literature focusing on theories appropriate to the phenomenon under investigation included CT theories related to sustainability, OP, and SMEs. Also, the existing theories confirmed the findings of this study as demonstrated in Chapter 5.

Triangulation is another way of establishing reliability and validity (Bashir, et al., 2008). Patton (2001) affirms that triangulation combines methods as does Bashir et al. (2008) who suggest the mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, such as observation, interviews, and recordings, as methods for triangulation. According to Barbour (1998), this is very difficult, as it is easy to mix paradigms but not methods. However, in this study, triangulation did not imply a mixture of methods.

The triangulation of the ILR of this study referred to a mixture of literature retrieved from a mixture of databases, subjects and disciplines, documents and source types, publishers, and journal collections. This study on its own was triangulated given that data were collected from various types of research methods, such as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, as

well as other literature systematically reviewed and adopted by other studies. The integrative literature review integrated ten perspectives which included seven categorised factors of the study, and three sustainability uses, such as implementation, integration and balance.

Furthermore, trustworthiness, rigour and quality in qualitative paradigms are assessed through reliability and validity (Bashir, et al., 2008). In this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1988) and Babbie, et al. (2007) identified research measurement tools for reliability and validity.

3.17 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ASSESSMENT

This section discusses the assessment of reliability and validity in the context of this study. In line with the above discussion, with a quantitative approach, the quality of research is evaluated using validity, reliability and objectivity (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). As this study adopted a qualitative approach, reliability and validity were considered. The validity and truthfulness of qualitative data depend on the credibility, transferability conformability and dependability of data (Petty, et al., 2012).

Charts of the content analysis were useful in that they might be used by other readers who are willing to verify the reliability and validity of the data. Validity and reliability are also related to the fundamental steps of a methodology, including data collection, coding or categorisation, analysis of content, and interpretation of results (Duriau, et al., 2007), which was clearly demonstrated in this study. Consistency, credibility and trustworthiness of the data are the criteria of validity in qualitative research (Bashir, et al., 2008). These criteria need to be defended when challenged (Bashir, et al., 2008).

3.17.1 Reliability

According to Bashir et al. (2008), reliability applies to any research approach. According to Babbie et al. (2007), it refers to the same findings being produced by the same data collected more than once for the same phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the reliability has been proven by the same findings collected from 2017 to 2024. Some findings have been the same from different literature publications and authors, different publication houses or sources and different years of publication. To illustrate this, many studies revealed that OP and

sustainability were challenged and were enabled by organisational or corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernism, and sustainable factors.

Furthermore, reliability demonstrates data and findings and examines their trustworthiness (Polit & Beck, 2009). Therefore, this study included a large amount of literature, which provided a considerable amount of retrieved data which will allow readers to examine the trustworthiness of the findings. Moreover, the appendices included in this document were classified according to the research objectives and questions, related to sustainability and OP enablers in **Appendices C, D, E, F, G, H** and **I.** Likewise, for the research objectives and questions related to OP and sustainability challenges in **Appendices C, D, E, F, G, H** and **I**. **Appendices J, K,** and **L** were appropriate for the research objectives and questions related to sustainability implementation, integration, and balance.

3.17.2 Validity

This section discusses the validity of this study.

Consistency, integrity and dependability justify the validity of data in qualitative research (Bashir, et al., 2008). Babbie et al., (2007) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) refer to validity as the extent of the similarities between the explanations of a phenomenon and its reality. The assumptions formulated in this study stated that enablers allowed the achievement of OP and the attainment of sustainability of SMEs; likewise, challenges existed that obstructed the achievement of OP and sustainability of SMEs. The reality of these statements was proven by the findings of the reviewed literature.

Descriptions and explanations are the core elements of validity in qualitative research (Bashir, et al., 2008). In this regard, validity aims to ensure that the explanation of a phenomenon matches its description, which refers to the real world. To discover the reality about sustainability and OP of South African SMEs, required a mixture of literature retrieved from numerous databases, subjects and disciplines, documents and source types, publications and journals which described the reality of the existing literature dealing with the phenomenon under study. According to Petty et al., (2012), Lincoln and Guba (1988) and Graneheim and Lundman (2004), the quality of qualitative research is classified as truth or credibility,

neutrality or conformability, consistency or dependability, and applicability or transferability. The next section discusses the credibility of this study.

3.17.3 Credibility

This section discusses the credibility of the findings of this study. Bashir et al. (2008) claim that there is a need for credibility and truth in any research approach. Tracy (2010) refers to the credibility of a qualitative study in terms of the trustworthiness, authenticity and plausibility of the research findings. These rely on the capability and endeavour of the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1988; Bashir, et al., 2008).

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) and Bradley (1993) explain that the evaluation of the validity of the real world under investigation is the main role of credibility. To achieve this, the integrity of the collected literature was represented **(**Thomas & Magilvy, 2011**)** in tables in the appendices. Morrow (2005) stated that the adequacy of findings is related to the integrity of the data. Thus, the details of the collected literature were provided in full meaning, names of authors, data of publications of reading materials, sources, and names of the publishing houses of the literature publications. From this, interpretations were verified against raw data (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Elo and Kynga (2008) suggest the use of appendices and tables to demonstrate the relationship between data and findings. According to Bowman (1997), annual reports are sufficient to prove the validity of data, because much time has been spent on preparing, writing, and presenting such documents. For this study, tables were used to present the relationships between data and findings. In addition, the collected reports are listed in the appendix tables.

To ensure credibility, multiple data collection and data analysis methods, including content analysis and thematic analysis, were used. The combination of these two methods was part of triangulation (Cho & Lee, 2014). In addition, all data collected from the different literature publications were presented with integrity (Morrow, 2005; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011;).

Appendices and tables were used as the link between the gathered data and their respective findings (Elo & Kynga, 2008). The raw data was stored securely for confidentiality purpose, and as the interpretations of the findings may be compared to raw information (Thomas &

Magilvy, 2011). The credibility of the findings was judged through the demonstration of the way the meaning units, condensations and abstractions were made (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Transferability is discussed in the following section.

3.17.4 Transferability

This section discusses the transferability of the findings of the qualitative research. The term 'transferability' means that the research findings of a specific study can be applied to another context (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The establishment of transferability requires the description of the population, demographics, and geographic boundaries of the phenomena under investigation (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). For this study, all these elements were described in detail. The description of the databases in Sections 3.10.1., 3.10.2., 3.10.3., reading material and literature were provided in detail in this chapter, Section 3.10.4., likewise, the boundaries of the literature reviewed were mentioned in Chapter 2.

To ensure the transferability of this study's findings, background information, such as sustainability and OP, was provided to establish the context of the study, as well as a comprehensive description of sustainability integration into OP and sustainability implementation in SMEs (Shenton, 2004; Cho & Lee, 2014). To apply this study's findings to another context in future (Mohajan, 2018), the scope of the study is clearly described, both categories and boundaries of the literature, as well as the targeted literature (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The confirmability of this study was discussed below.

3.17.5 Confirmability

This section deals with confirmability. The ease of access and transparency of data is the focal point of confirmability (Richards, 2009). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) and Holliday and Galvin (2023) suggested that for this reason, data should be presented in full. Hence, to ensure the transparency of the collected literature, all gathered publications are presented in a comprehensive manner in Chapter 4, in line with the research objectives and questions. Similarly, the collected literature was presented in full in the appendices, making it possible for the readers and examiners to revise and confirm the research findings (Bradley, 1993; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This is a way of checking confirmability (Holliday & Galvin, 2023).

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) acknowledged that audits based on research data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations are the preferred way of checking confirmability. They also suggest that raw data, field notes, theoretical notes and memos, coding manuals, categorisation manuals, and process notes are considered as materials for auditing. Since the findings of this study have not been reviewed by other readers due to time constraints, this study demonstrated how manual coding and categorisation was done and provided the raw collected literature in the appendices.

The study discussed and interpreted the findings in line with the collected literature, and in the same way, the recommendations were compiled in line with the collected data. The collected literature is fully presented in appendices, and the detailed description of findings were made available for potential readers and examiners, as well as potential researchers who are willing to embrace a similar topic. The following section discusses the dependability of the findings.

3.17.6 Dependability

According to Thomas and Magilvy (2011), the determination of appropriate techniques for ensuring the reliability and validity of data are processes to verify dependability. Dependability refers to the processes followed to conduct the study (Richards, 2009), which included the discussions on the research objectives in Chapter 1, the integrative literature review as the selected research method as discussed in this Chapter 3, the selection of relevant and appropriate literature; the described sampling and literature collection, the description of the analysis process for the literature, the description of the management of the collected literature including its reduction and transformation into data in an analytical form; and the discussion and reporting of findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In particular, for this study, the identification of gaps in the literature is discussed in Chapter 5, and the compiling of the research agenda relative to the identified gaps in Chapter 6. The ethical considerations for this study are discussed in the subsequent section.

3.18 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section responded to the enquiry of ethics in this study. This study followed and was protected by the respective ethics of the University of Witwatersrand. The research project was

presented and defended before a panel. After approval, the research proposal and the data collection instrument were submitted to the Ethics Committee to request ethical clearance. The application was done online. The application form was completed and submitted electronically to the Ethics Committee. The application was approved and an ethical clearance was granted to conduct this study. The reference of the certificate granted is: ***Clearance certificate protocol number: H21/10/03.*** The ethical clearance certificate is attached to this thesis as Appendix M

The following section outlines the advantages of using the ILR in this study.

3.19 ADVANTAGES OF THE INTEGRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses and enumerates the benefits or advantages of using ILR in this study, as identified below.

The integrative review of this study summarised past research on sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs by drawing overall conclusions from several studies (Broome, 2000). It can be characterised by the concentrated attention paid to a topical sustainability and OP area (Callahan, 2010), as well as sectors, such as SMEs in the context of SA in particular. It identified the methodology (Callahan, 2010) in the reviewed studies. It involved the identification of the existing theory, concepts, contexts, conceptual frameworks, theoretical frameworks, and models for organisations in the reviewed studies.

Integrative literature reviews with strong theoretical implications involve literature including mixtures of current bodies of theory, innovative substantive theories, exploratory conceptual models, taxonomies, and typology. These were developed as foundations for theory, treatises in formal theory construction, as well as papers on the history of theory, critiques of theory that includes alternative research propositions and metatheory (Callahan, 2010).

ILR contributed to the upholding of the current knowledge based on sustainability and OP (Cooper, 1998). At the same time, integrative reviews provided the researcher with the tools to manage a rapidly growing area of research (Torraco, 2016) that lacks sufficient coverage (Snyder, 2019).

The research method adopted for this qualitative study was an integrative literature review.

This method was chosen to explore the diverse types of reviews that have been used in the investigation of sustainability and the organisational performance of South African SMEs (Snyder, 2019). An integrative literature review was relevant in this instance because it helped to maintain focus on the topic and the context of this study.

This type of review was, therefore, suitable for this study as it provided the researcher with the tools to manage a rapidly growing area of research (Torraco, 2016) that lacked sufficient coverage. Integrative review allows one to manage the rapidly growing area of OP and sustainability research (Torraco, 2016). The growing area of OP and sustainability lacks sufficient coverage in the SME context in general and particularly the South African context (Snyder, 2019).

The integrative review assisted in filling this gap. The integrative literature review began with the collection of literature relative to the topic, followed by the research objectives and the conceptual framework of this study. An effective use of an integrative review produces significant benefits (MacInnis, 2011). It helped hold precise and contemporary understanding of information relevant to sustainability and OP studies and practices, viewed the volume of completed research growth and the intensification of specialisation, as well as the constant challenge faced by the academic individual (Cooper, 1998).

The integrative literature review helped identify gaps in current OP and sustainability publications (Russell, 2004). First, for each finding of OP and sustainability, the gaps were identified, on the one hand, in terms of OP dimensions including financial performance, operational performance, market performance and growth performance, and on the other hand, in terms of sustainability dimensions including environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

In this study, the integrative review was well-prepared to represent the state of the current research literature on sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs by way of a methodical research literature analysis and a summarised process (Russell, 2005).

The ILR was advantageous in assessing the strength of the scientific evidence of sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs, and in particular, the challenges and enablers of sustainability and OP achievements, steps of sustainability incorporation into OP, phases of sustainability

execution in OP, and methods of sustainability equilibrium in OP (Russell, 2005). The ILR allowed for the identification of gaps in the existing studies on enablers and challenges of OP achievement, challenges and enablers of sustainability achievement, stages of sustainability incorporation into OP, phases of sustainability implementation in OP, and tactics of sustainability equilibrium in OP (Cooper, 1998).

The need for future research was identified by the conducted ILR (Cooper, 1998) that was in line with the identified gaps in the literature. ILR enabled bridge-building between related areas of OP and sustainability (Cooper, 1998). The fundamental issues of sustainability and OP achievements were identified through the ILR (Cooper, 1998). The ILR conducted in this study helped identify relevant components for the development of not only a conceptual framework (Cooper, 1998), but also a categorical framework, contextual outline, and business model, as well as concept and theory building.

By conducting the ILR in this study, other research questions were generated, for future investigations. The ILR successfully explored and used research methods in the reviewed studies, identified the missing research methods and suggested the application of those methods through the proposed methodical research agenda (Cooper, 1998).

In this study, the literature review was a critical summary of research on sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs (Polit & Beck, 2009). The use of a literature review in research is very important, since it gives one the opportunity to explore multiple published studies of the topic in a particular discipline. It allows the review of countless studies from various journal sources related to the specific subject in a precise discipline. Also, it allows the collection of multiple factors and aspects covering the study.

At the PhD level, the literature review method (LRM) is very helpful in gaining reliable information to respond adequately to the research question and attend to the research objectives of the study. Much information can be gathered in a LRM that might not be collected if other research methods were adopted. Moreover, since a PhD thesis requires the generation of new thoughts, philosophies, ideas, and research agendas, as well as the building of knowledge by the means of theories, frameworks, and business model extensions, as well as novel theories, outlines, and business model development, its feasibility might be adequately achieved through

the use of an LRM. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to miss relevant information that would answer the addressed research problems when using the LRM.

Besides developing or extending a framework, models, and theories, the LRM has the capability of building novel concepts. The findings of the LRM were a useful research instrument for future investigations by academics and practitioners. The identified gaps in the reviewed studies recommend the necessity for future investigations on the missing OP and sustainability dimensions, as well as SDGs of SMEs anywhere else and in South Africa (Russell, 2005).

The literature review conducted was found advantageous for the following reasons:

- It allowed the better understanding of OP and sustainability phenomena
- It helped towards the consideration of the topic of sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs
- It allowed one to perceive all aspects involving the topic of sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs
- It permitted the detection of all missing points of SA SME literature based on OP and sustainability
- It developed the understanding of the researcher
- It generated a model for implementing a literature review methodology for Master's and PhD students
- It became an international data collection instrument in terms of available topics for future investigations (as a thesis written as a total IRL)
- It became a research support for future studies

The next section addresses the limitations faced in this study.

3.20 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section addresses the challenges and difficulties faced while conducting this study. The demarcation and the scope of the study were discussed in Chapter 1.

The ILR of this study was challenged by the following constraints:

- It was not easy to select relevant respondents or literature in this study due to the broad and large population of e-resources of Wits library.
- The lack of literature to answer all the research questions of the study. For instance, of all the literature reviewed, no study revealed the sustainability implementation phases, sustainability integration steps, and sustainability balance approach.
- The sampling process experienced complications
- Many studies did not fit precisely within the context of the study. That was a challenge as the literature contained relevant information for this study, however, these had to be extracted.
- Many studies based on OP and sustainability did not cover the research questions of this study.
- Some studies were based on both SMEs and large companies.
- Some were based on both SA and SA SMEs.
- Some studies addressed various factors while complicating the transcribing process and categorisation process.
- This ILR was different from other literature reviews conducted in the past; a paper at Master's level was used as experience and a basis to collect data.
- Many papers did not provide the databases' names.
- Difficulties sampling databases as the population of the study.
- There was very little reading material in business and management-related sources addressing sustainability and OP in SMEs simultaneously. To overcome this limitation, the literature publications were extended from management and business to sources related to other topics of this study, including entrepreneurship, performance, sustainable development, sustainability, small enterprises, organisations, and enterprise-related sources.
- Topics, such as sustainability integration, sustainability implementation and sustainability balance are mainly covered by cleaner production journals, whereas it is very rare to find these three themes in management and business-related journals. Thus, any business, environmental, social, and economic sustainability journals and articles addressing sustainability and OP in SMEs, as well as sustainability integration, sustainability implementation and sustainability balance, will be considered to enlarge the content of the literature review.
- Some literature was duplicated, however, the volume number, issue number and page numbers were different, and in some cases, even missing.

- Surprisingly, the availability of some literature was shown and found on Wits online library but downloading was not possible, resulting in a failed attempt. These journals were subsequently located by using Google Scholar but for those not found, Research Gate was used.
- Access to some literature publications was obstructed by the system itself. When downloading the paper or journal, the downloading process was stopped immediately when the following message appeared on the screen: "Visiting an untrustworthy website has been prevented" or 403 Forbidden or "You do not have access to this article online".
- Some literature found online did allow access to the full text, which was not available through Google Scholar, Research Gate or other popular scholarly online resources. An example of one such resource was Soekarno, Magetsari, Mirzanti & Lantu, (2020), Performance assessment framework for small and medium enterprises. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, 26(1/2), 57.
- Some literature found online did not have access to the full text on any of the sites, such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, Google, and Wits, such as Soekarno, Magetsari, Mirzanti and Lantu, (2020).
- Some literature found online did not have a full document in MS Word and/or PDF, such as Laureiro-Martínez and Brusoni (2018). The system mentioned **"403 Forbidden".**
- Some studies dealt simultaneously with more than one factor. It was very difficult to categorise them in the web appendices' tables. Two purposes relative to this study, for instance, Journeault, Perron and Valli`eres (2021) dealt with the sustainability implementation and barriers for its adoption.

3.21 SUMMARY

This qualitative study investigated how sustainability can enhance the organisational performance (OP) of South African SMEs. The research objectives of this study involved the identification of problems impeding the attainment of better performance in SMEs, the description of environmental, economic and social problems hampering performance activities in SMEs, the establishing steps for the integration of sustainability into OP, the investigation

of phases to implement sustainability for the OP of SMEs, and exploring approaches to attain ecological, social and economic symmetries in SMEs' performance. The study adopted an interpretive paradigm with an exploratory design. The study targeted the e-resources of the Wits library. Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from theoretical, conceptual and key topics in the form of a literature review, while thematic analysis was used to analyse purposive, thematic, and contextual literature.

The ethical considerations were adhered to by ensuring the truthfulness of the qualitative approach, which included the credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of data, as well as the ethical clearance obtained from the University of Witwatersrand (Wits). The limitations of the study can be described in terms of the researcher's challenges, as well as the limitations of the literature review, data collection and data analysis. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the expansion and development of theories and research methodologies, as well as the improvement of sustainable practices and performance of SMEs.

Chapter 4 presents the findings, literature analysis and discussions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS, LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings, literature analysis and discussions.
This chapter is linked to the research questions presented in Chapter 1 of this study:

- **RQ1a)** What are OP enablers and how do these enablers facilitate the attainment of OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ1b)** What are OP enablers and how do OP enablers facilitate the attainment of sustainability and OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ2a)** What are the challenges impeding the attainment of OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ2b)** What are the challenges impeding the attainment of sustainability of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ3)** What are the phases for implementing sustainability in SMEs in SA?
- **RQ4)** What are the steps for incorporating sustainability into OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ5)** What are the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs in SA?

This chapter in Section 4.2, presents the collected literature published from 2017 to 2024, associated with the topic of sustainability and OP of SA SMEs in general, and particularly, the research questions, based on Appendices C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and L, The content analysis of the overall collected literature is presented in Section 4.3**,** followed by the thematic analysis in Section 4.4. The discussions of the findings are as follows: Section 4.5 the OP enablers, Section 4.6 the sustainability enablers, Section 4.7 the OP challenges, Section 4.8 the sustainability challenges, Section 4.9 the implementation phases, Section 4.10 the integration steps into OP, and Section 4.11 the sustainability balance approaches.

In this chapter, tables are used to present the collected literature and the thematic analysis, while the content analysis of the collected literature is shown comprehensively in charts.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF THE COLLECTED DATA

This section deals with the presentation of the collected literature related to the research questions mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.7 and Section 4.1.

According to Liberati et al. (2009), the strength of the study should be presented formally, and similarly, the strength of evidence corresponding to every key finding should be encompassed in the main findings. Thus, by using tables, this section presents the details of all the collected literature that encompassed the research concerns and objectives of this study in Chapter 1, Sections 1.6 and 1.7.

4.2.1 Presentation of the collected literature on enablers and challenges of organisational performance and sustainability

This section unveils the collected literature in line with Research Questions 1 and 2 (RQ1 and RQ2) of this study formulated in Chapter 1, Section. 1.7 as below:

- **RQ1a)** What are OP enablers and how do these enablers facilitate the attainment of OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ1b)** What are OP enablers and how do OP enablers facilitate the attainment of sustainability and OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ2a)** What are the challenges impeding the attainment of OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ2b)** What are the challenges impeding the attainment of sustainability of SMEs in SA?

All collected literature corresponding to the above research questions are shown in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Collected literature on organisational performance (OP) and sustainability enablers and challenges

Nbr	Items descriptions	Broad context	SME sector	South African SMEs	Total
01	Organisational factors	397	334	180	**911**
02	Managerial factors	308	142	53	**503**
03	Business factors	103	71	15	**189**
04	Entrepreneurial factors	312	253	43	**608**
05	Leadership factors	347	159	10	**516**
06	Modernity factors	312	130	15	**457**
07	Sustainable factors	514	298	70	**882**
	Total	**2293**	**1387**	**386**	**4066**

Source: Author's own

The table presented above was compiled from *Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G and H.* Objectives and indicators were identical and taken from the same perspective. Table 4.1 shows the total number of literature publications that concern the enablers and challenges of both OP and sustainability. During transcription, the collected data were classified into seven categories, namely corporate, organisational, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernism, and sustainable factors. The collected data were also broken down into three classes depending on the type of the companies' sectors and sizes.

The first column lists the number of items, the second describes the items, and the third column display s the number of the literature publications collected depending on the factor categories. The third column (broad context) exhibits literature other than the sectors of the SMEs and SA SMEs. The fourth column (SMEs sector) presents the number of literature publications collected on SMEs in general, besides SA SMEs. The fifth column (South African SME) demonstrates the number of literature publications collected on SA SMEs in line with their respective categories or factors. The sixth column (total) informs the total number of collected literature per factor. In addition to this, the interpretations of the collected data as presented in the table in line with the research queries of this study are discussed in Section 4.3.1 of this chapter.

4.2.2 Presentation of the collected literature on sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in organisational performance

The current section is based on the presentation of the collected literature which corresponds to the third, fourth and fifth research questions (RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5) of this study established in Chapter 1 Section 1.7 as follows:

- **RQ3)** What are the phases for implementing sustainability in SMEs in SA?
- **RQ4)** What are the steps for incorporating sustainability into OP of SMEs in SA?
- **RQ5)** What are the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs in SA?

Table 4.2 below presents the collected literature on sustainability implementation phases, sustainability integration steps, and sustainability balance approaches of OP of SMEs.

Table 4.2: Collected literature on sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in organisational performance (OP)

Nbr	Items descriptions	Broad context	SMEs sector	South African SMEs	Total
01	Sustainability implementation	341	218	41	**600**
02	Sustainability integration	228	15	1	**244**
03	Sustainability balance	85	5	0	**90**
	Total	**654**	**238**	**42**	**934**

Source: Author's own

Appendices I, J and K were the basis for the contents of the above table. Table 4.2 was designed similarly to Table 4.1with the same number of columns comprising the same items. Here, the total number of collected literature publications on sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in organisational performance (OP) are displayed as follows: companies other than

SMEs and SA SMEs are demonstrated in Column 3, while literature on the generic SME industry is presented in Column 4, whereas all collected literature on SA SMEs are displayed in Column 5, and finally, the total of all these literatures are in Column 6. Table 4.2 shows that of **934** literature publications, **600** focus on sustainability implementation in OP, **244** focus on sustainability integration into OP, and **90** publications deal with sustainability balance in OP. In addition, this table shows that 654 literature publications covered the broad context, while 238 covered SME industry, and only 42 focused on SA SMEs. Furthermore, Section 4.3.2 of this chapter offers further insight into the results captured in Table 4.2**.**

4.2.3 Presentation of the extracted and selected studies for the discussions

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.8, not all the contents of the collected literature publications were discussed. Hence, this section presents the collected literature corresponding to all the research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5) presented in Chapter 1, Section 1.7. Table 4.3 shows the literature publications that were selected for the discussions of the contents and those that were removed (extracted) from the analysis.

Table 4.3: Extracted literature and selected literature for the discussions

Nbr	Items descriptions	Extracted studies	Selected SMEs studies	Selected SA SMEs studies	Total
01	Organisational factors	397	334	180	**911**
02	Managerial factors	308	142	53	**503**
03	Business factors	103	71	15	**189**
04	Entrepreneurial factors	312	253	43	**608**
05	Leadership factors	347	159	10	**516**
06	Modernity factors	312	130	15	**457**
07	Sustainable factors	514	298	70	**882**
08	Sustainability implementation	341	218	41	**600**
09	Sustainability integration	228	15	1	**244**

10	Sustainability balance	85	5	0	**90**
	Total	**2947**	**1625**	**428**	**5000**

Source: Author's own

Contrary to Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, the above table combines all literature publications collected for this study. There were 5000, however, some were extracted before discussing the contents, while others were selected for further thoughts. Following the representation above, out of 5000 collected literature publications, 2947 from the broad context were removed from the discussions, while 1625 literature publications from general SMEs and 428 literature publications based on SA SMEs were selected for discussion. The details of the interpretations about Table 4.3. are provided in Section 4.3.3.

Out of 911 literature publications focused on corporate factors, 397 were from the broad context, while 334 covering SMEs sector were included, like wise 180 literature publications on SA SMEs were included for discussions. Regarding managerial factors, out of 503 literature publications collected, 308 within the broad context were excluded, while 142 on SMEs and 53 on SA SMEs were selected. Referring to the total of 189 literature publications collected on business factors, 103 from the broad context were extracted, while 71 were based on SMEs, and 15 publications on SA SMEs. from the literature covering entrepreneurial factors, 608 were collected, 312 from the wide context were removed, while 253 from the SME sector were selected, in the same way 43 literature publications covering the SA context were selected.

Table 4.3 shows that 516 literature publications on leadership factors., and from them 347 were removed from the discussions, while 159 based on SMEs and 10 SA SMEs were selected. Out of 457 literature publications collected on modernity factors, 312 from the broad context were extracted, 130 on SMEs were selected, and likewise, 15 on SA SMEs were chosen. In addition to this, 882 literature publications on sustainable factors were gathered, and out of them 514 on broad context were excluded, 298 based on SMEs were chosen while 70 covered SA.

Regarding sustainability implementation, 600 publications were collected. From them, 341 including company sizes other than SMEs and SA SMEs were extracted, while 218 on the SME sector were selected, and similarly, 41 covering SA SMEs were selected. While 244 literature publications covering sustainability integration into OP were collected. Among them, 228 on

broad context were excluded, 15 focused on SMEs were selected, and only 1 publication on SA SMEs was chosen. Whereas 90 studies on sustainability balance approaches were gathered, and of them, 85 that were not focused on SMEs and SA SMEs were extracted, while 5 on the studies on SMEs were selected for further discussions. However, no study on SA SMEs was collected, and could not be selected. The next section presents exclusively the literature publications collected on the SME sector and SA SMEs.

4.2.4 Presentation of the literature restricted to SMEs only

This section, represented in Table 4.4 below presents the total number of literature publications restricted to both SMEs, and SA SMEs:

Table 4.4: Total selected literature on both generic SMEs and SA SMEs

Nbr	Items descriptions	Selected SMEs studies	Selected SA SMEs studies	Total
01	Organisational factors	334	180	**514**
02	Managerial factors	142	53	**195**
03	Business factors	71	15	**86**
04	Entrepreneurial factors	253	43	**296**
05	Leadership factors	159	10	**169**
06	Modernity factors	130	15	**145**
07	Sustainable factors	298	70	**368**
08	Sustainability implementation	218	41	**259**
09	Sustainability integration	15	1	**16**
10	Sustainability balance	5	0	**5**
	Total	**1625**	**428**	**2053**

Source: Author's own

Table 4.4 above, shows the total number of literature publications collected on SMEs in general and SA SMEs in particular. This table shows that out of 2053 collected journals, 1625 covered SMEs, while 428 focused on SA SMEs. The number of the literature publications per research

question are explained in greater detail in Table 4.3. Moreover, the justifications and interpretations of these numbers are discussed in Section 4.3.4 of the current chapter. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this section deals with the literature covering both SMEs and SA SMEs., while the next section presents studies based on SA SMEs only.

4.2.5 Presentation of the exclusive contextual literature

In this section, literature publications focused on SA SMEs only are presented. The details are displayed in Table 4.5 below:

Table 4.5: Total selected literature publications on SMEs only

Nbr	Factor description	SA SMEs Literature
01	Corporate factors	**180**
02	Management factors	**53**
03	Business factors	**15**
04	Entrepreneurial factors	**43**
05	Leadership factors	**10**
06	Modernity factors	**15**
07	Sustainability factors	**70**
08	Sustainability implementation phases	**41**
09	Sustainability integration steps	**1**
10	Sustainability balance approaches	**0**
	Total of literatures found on SA SMEs	**428**

Source: Author's own

The above table shows that a total of 428 literature publications were found in the all the literature collected on SA SMEs. The number of literature publication factors or research questions is provided in Table 4.1 in Section 4.2. The explanation about the analysis of the contents of this table is presented in Section 4.3 of this chapter, while the themes included in the table are presented in Section 4.4. Furthermore, the contents of the above table were interpreted in this chapter in Section 4.3.5. The analysis of contents of all tables presented in this section are analysed in the next section.

4.3 CONTENT ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

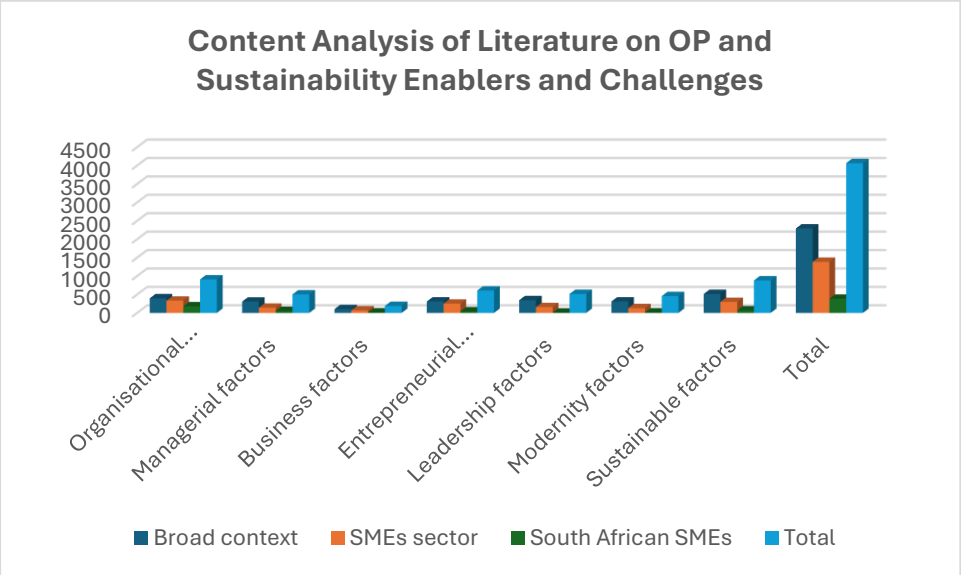
This section presents the content analysis of the collected literature using figures for visual representation.

The literature review conducted in this study observed the principle of starting wider with the review and narrowing to the context of the study. The study proceeded to the summative content analysis using figures to demonstrate the extent to which literature publications were collected and examined. Although these charts included first, three categories of companies, such as broad context, which related to any companies that did not fall under SMEs and SA SMEs, second, seven categories of factors enabling and challenging sustainability and OP, and third, as summative content analysis for a qualitative study like this one, numbers were included in the figures to show the estimated average of the literature publications.

4.3.1 Content analysis of the reviewed literature on enablers and challenges of organisational performance (OP) and sustainability

In this section, the contents of the collected and reviewed literature relative to research RQ1 and RQ2 which focused on OP and sustainability challenges and enablers are presented in Table 4.1, Section 4.2.1 and are analysed here. Thus, the below figure provides insight.

Figure 4.1: Content analysis of the reviewed literature on enablers and challenges of organisational performance and sustainability



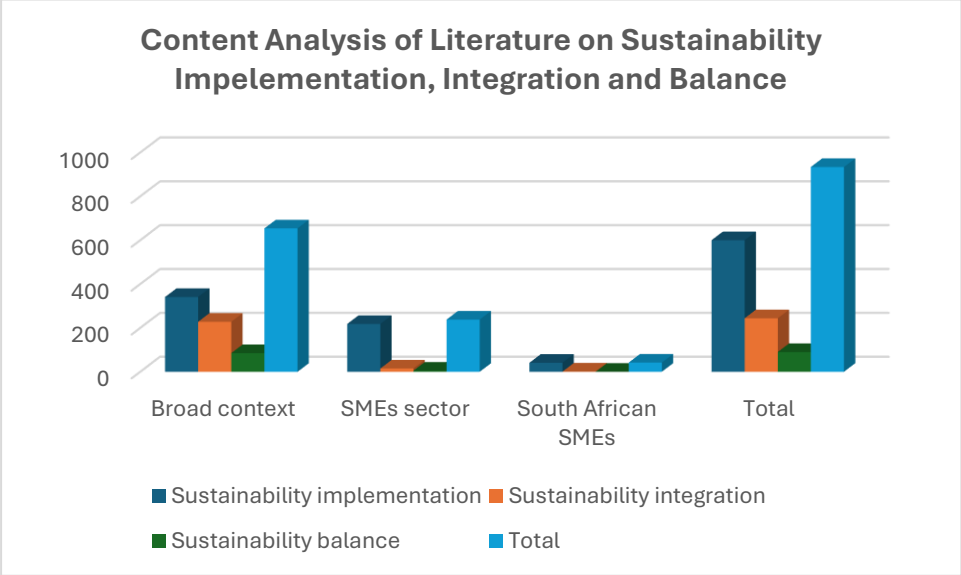
Source: Author's own

Figure 4.1 shows that there are not many literature publications based on SA SMEs among the collected literature. There were more publications in other contexts than SA, followed by the general SME sector. SA SMEs were the least.

4.3.2 Content analysis of the reviewed literature on sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in organisational performance (OP)

This section discusses the content analysis of the collected and reviewed literature related to research RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5, presented in Section 4.2.2 and Table 4.2 which implied sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in OP of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Figure 4.2: Content analysis of the reviewed literature on sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in organisational performance



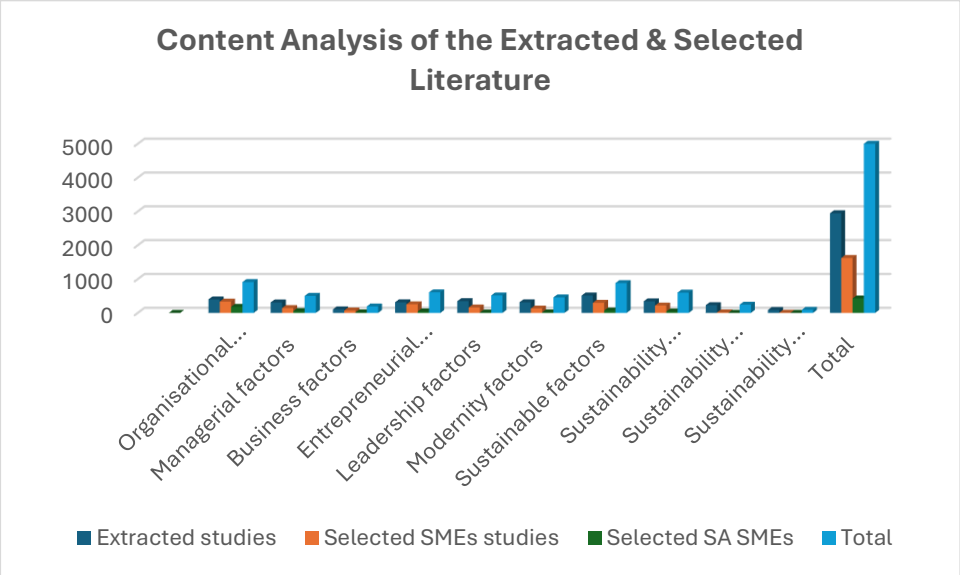
Source: Author's own

Figure 4.2 illustrates there were more publications on sustainability implementation than sustainability integration and balance. Furthermore, there were very few publications focused on SA SMEs. More publications were focused on broad contexts, followed by the SME sector, followed by SA SMEs. This might indicate that there are not many publications on the topic of sustainability and OP in the context of SA.

4.3.3 Content analysis of the extracted and selected studies for the discussions

Based on Section 4.2.3, this section presents the content analysis of the extracted and selected literature in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Content analysis of the extracted and selected studies for the discussions



Source: Author's own

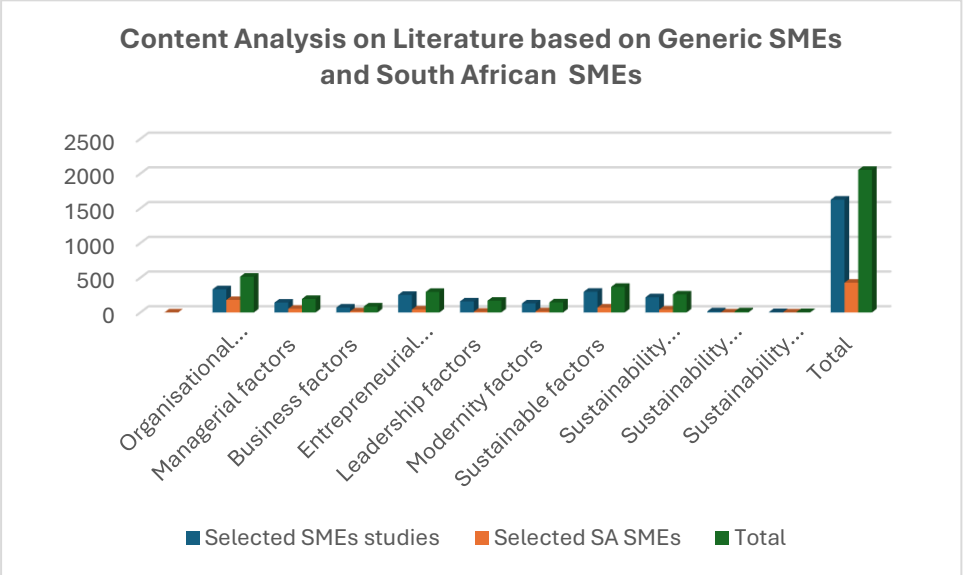
Figure 4.3 above illustrates the number of literature publications that were extracted before the discussions of the findings and those that were selected for further interpretation. The above figure shows that there were more extracted literature publications. This may be explained in the following reasons:

- The content did not respond to the research questions of the study
- The size of the firms was not mentioned
- The literature fell under other SME sectors than SA SMEs
- The literature was duplicated
- The lack of full-text publications and the available abstract did not provide the answer to the enquiries of the study.

4.3.4 Content analysis of the reviewed literature on both SMEs and SA SMEs

This section presents the content analysis of the literature covering both generic SMEs and SA SMEs, presented in Table 4.4, Section 4.2.4 of this study. The content analysed is displayed in the figure below.

Figure 4.4: Content analysis of the reviewed literature on both generic SMEs and SA SMEs



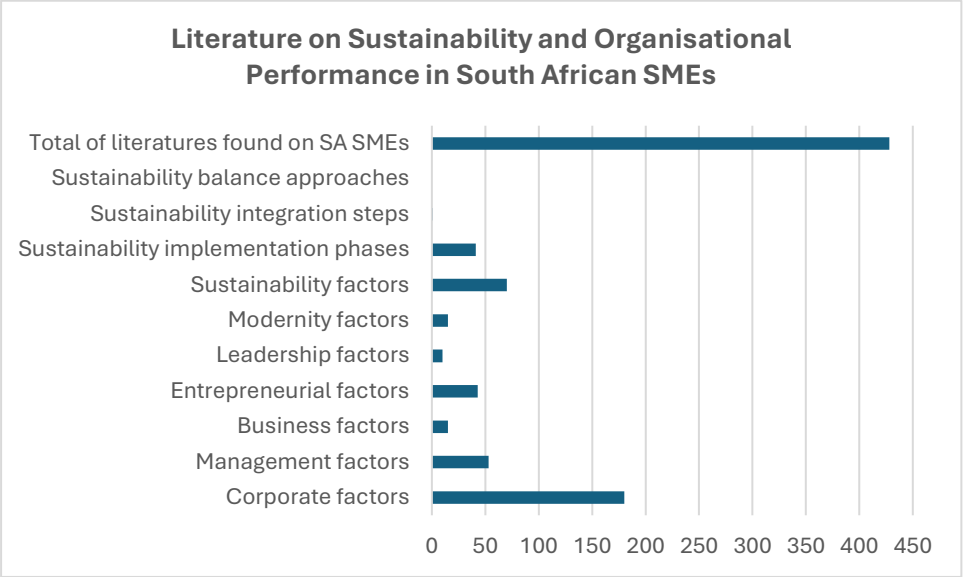
Source: Author's own

According to Figure 4.4, when comparing publications on general SMEs and SA SMEs, there were more publications on generic SMEs than South African. This indicates the need for further research in the South African SME context.

4.3.5 Contextual content analysis of the reviewed literature based on South African SMEs only

Figure 4.5 below presents the content analysis of the literature focused only on SA SMEs in Table 4.5, Section 4.2.5 of this study.

Figure 4.5: Contextual content analysis literature based on South African SMEs



Source: Author's own

The above figure displays two categories of the findings. The first one exhibits literature based on the sustainability implementation phases, integration steps, and balance approaches, while the second shows literature on factors enabling and challenging the achievement of sustainability and OP of SA SMEs. The first category answered RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5, while the second responded to RQ1 and RQ2. In Figure 4.5, literature on sustainability integration steps was almost non-existent since only one literature publication was found, however, there was no literature found on sustainability balance approach in SMEs. The analysis above demonstrates that there was more literature on corporate factors (CFs), followed by sustainable factors (SFs), while managerial factors (MFs) came in third before entrepreneurial factors (EFs), and literature on modernity factors (MOFs) and business factors (BFs) occupied the same position, however, studies on leadership factors (LFs) came last.

The contents of Figure 4.5 did not seem to be satisfactory. This indicates there is still more research to be conducted on SA SMEs in general, and particularly on integration phases and balance approaches. Likewise, investigations should be conducted on modernity, business, and leadership, particularly in the field of management and business.

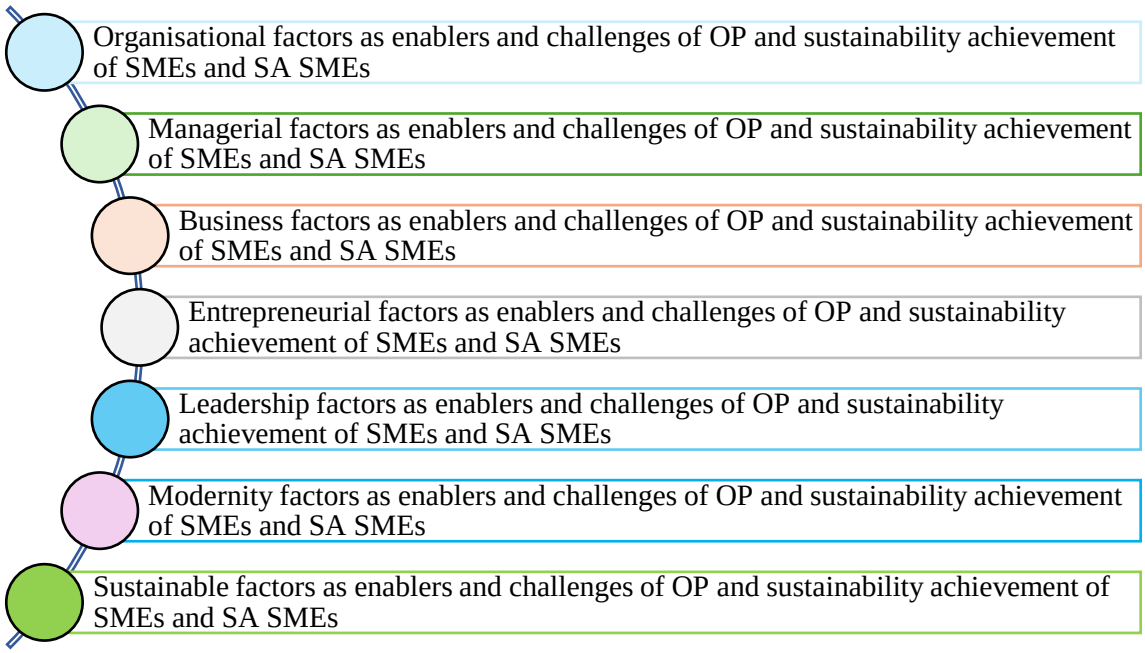
4.4 THEMATIC ANALYSED DATA AND FINDINGS

This section discusses the thematic analysis of the collected and reviewed literature. The thematic analysis was based on the multiple categories generated by the findings of the reviewed literature. The thematic analysis was also done in line with the formulated research questions of this study. The following section discusses the thematic analysis of literature related to OP and sustainability enablers and challenges.

4.4.1 Thematic analysis of literature on enablers and challenges of sustainability and organisational performance

This section presents the thematic analysis of the literature related to the research question on OP and sustainability challenges and enablers of generic SMEs and SA SMEs. The categorisation and interpretations of the collected literature generated seven themes that had the potential to answer RQ1 and RQ2, and are formulated as in Figure 4.6 (below):

Figure 4.6: Thematic analysis of factors enabling and challenging sustainability and organisational performance



Source: Author's own

Figure 4.6 shows the themes generated from the categorisation of the literature and the search of factors enabling and challenging sustainability and organisational performance. In line with this, Table 4.6 below ranks the occurrence of these themes in the reviewed literature.

Table 4.6: Thematic analysis of the regularity of factors enabling and challenging sustainability and organisational performance

Theme rankings from the predominant to the lowest	**Theme rankings of all reviewed literature from the predominant to the lowest**	**Theme rankings of reviewed literature on broad context from the predominant to the lowest**	**Theme rankings of reviewed literature on SME sector from the predominant to the lowest**	**Theme rankings of reviewed literature on SA SMEs from the predominant to the lowest**
First position	Corporate factors	Sustainable factors	Corporate factors	Corporate factors
Second position	Sustainable factors	Corporate factors	Sustainable factors	Sustainable factors
Third position	Entrepreneurial factors	Leadership factors	Entrepreneurial factors	Managerial factors
Fourth position	Leadership factors	Modernity factors and entrepreneurial factors	Leadership factors	Entrepreneurial factors
Fifth position	Managerial factors	Managerial factors	Managerial factors	Business factors and modernity factors
Sixth position	Modernity factors	Business factors	Modernity factors	Leadership factors
Seventh position	Business factors	Not available	Business factors	Not available

Source: Author's own

The above table discloses the thematic analysis of the literature reviewed conducted in this study by referring to Table 4.1 The predominant themes available and explored in the reviewed literature might be estimated in this gradual manner from the predominant to the lowest factors found in the literature. Predominant factors covered in the overall literature included: **1)** organisational or corporate factors as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs, **2)** SFs as enablers and challenges of OP and

sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs**, 3)** EFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs**, 4)** LFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs, **5)** MFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs, **6)** MOFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs, and **7)** BFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Factors covered in SME literature from the most predominant to the lowest were ranked as follows: **1)** organisational or CFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs, **2)** SFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs, **3)** EFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs, **4)** LFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs, **5)** MFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs, **6)** MOFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs, and **7)** BFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs.

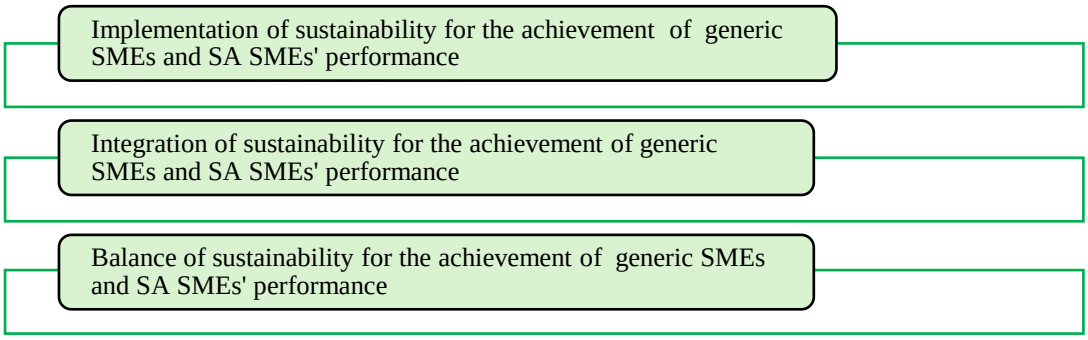
Contrary to the above, factors covered in SA SMEs literature from the predominant to the lowest were ranked as follows: **1)** CFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SA SMEs, **2)** SFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SA SMEs, **3)** MFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SA SMEs, 4) EFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SA SMEs, **5)** BFs and modernity factors as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SA SMEs, and **6)** LFs as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement of SA SMEs. However, the next section discusses the thematic analysis of the literature on sustainability implementation phases, integration steps and balance approaches in OP.

4.4.2 Thematic analysis of literature on sustainability implementation phases, integration steps and balance approaches in organisational performance

This section discusses the thematic analysis of literature on sustainability implementation, integration and balance in generic SMEs and SA SMEs. The categorisation and interpretations

of the collected literature generated themes that answered RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5. These are articulated in Figure 4.7 (below).

Figure 4.7: Thematic analysis of literature on sustainability implementation phases, integration steps and balance approaches in organisational performance



Source: Author's own

The above figure shows the themes generated in the search for sustainability implementation phases, sustainability integration steps and a balanced sustainability to OP of generic SMEs and SA SMEs. Table 4.7 below orders the frequency of these themes from the collected and reviewed literature.

Table 4.7: Thematic analysis of literature regularity on sustainability implementation phases, integration steps and balanced approaches to organisational performance

Themes ranking from the predominant to the lowest	**Themes ranking of the reviewed literature from the predominant to the lowest**	**Themes ranking of reviewed literature on broad context from the predominant to the lowest**	**Themes ranking of reviewed literature on SME sector from the predominant to the lowest**	**Themes ranking of reviewed literature on SA SMEs from the predominant to the lowest**
First position	Sustainability implementation	Sustainability implementation	Sustainability implementation	Sustainability implementation
Second position	Sustainability integration	Sustainability integration	Sustainability integration	Sustainability integration
Third position	Sustainability balance	Sustainability balance	Sustainability balance	Not available

Source: Author's own

The above table displays the thematic analysis of the reviewed literature. Table 4.7 shows the following:

- Factors covered in the broad literature from the predominant to the lowest were ranked as follows: **1)** sustainability implementation phases in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs 2) sustainability integration steps in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs**,** and **3)** sustainability balance approaches in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs.

- Factors covered in SME literature from the predominant to the lowest were ranked as follows: **1)** sustainability implementation phases in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs, **2)** sustainability integration steps in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs**,** and **3)** sustainability balance approaches in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs.

- Factors covered in SA SME literature from the predominant to the lowest were ranked as follows: **1)** sustainability implementation phases in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs, **2)** sustainability integration steps in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs of SA SMEs**,** and **3)** there was nothing to report.

4.4.3 Findings of research objective 1: Enablers that facilitate the achievement of operational performance and sustainability of small and medium enterprises

This section presents the findings of research objective 1 in a tabular form only. The findings of research objective 1 are discussed in Sections 4.5 and 4.6

The following tables present the CFs that facilitate the achievement of OP and sustainability of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Table 4.8: Corporate factors enabling the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Corporate resources	Corporate behaviours	Corporate practices
1. Financial resources 2. Physical resources 3. Human resource 4. Awareness 5. Intellectual capital 6. Skills 7. Perception 8. Knowledge 9. Talent 10. Organisational culture	1. Corporate commitment 2. Corporate engagement 3. Corporate attitude 4. Corporate agility 5. Corporate ambidexterity 6. Corporate capability 7. Other capabilities	1. Corporate networking 2. Innovation and creativity 3. Organisational learning

Source: Author's own

Table 4.8 shows various aspects of CFs that enable OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs. The content of this figure is discussed in sections: 4.5.1, 4.5.2, 4.5.3 and 4.6.1 of this chapter.

Table 4.9: Managerial factors enabling the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Managerial behaviours	Managerial practices	Other managerial factors
1. Managerial competencies 2. Trust 3. Commitment	1. Planning 2. Strategy 3. Supply chain management	1. Corporate networking 2. Innovation and creativity 3. Organisational learning

	4. Total quality management 6. Marketing 7. Human resource management 8. Accounting 9. Management accounting 10. Other managerial factors	

Source: Author's own

Table 4.9 shows various aspects of MFs that enable OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs. The content of this figure is discussed in sections: 4.5.4, 4.5.5, 4.5.6 and 4.6.2 of this chapter.

Table 4.10: Business, entrepreneurial and leadership factors enabling the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Business factors	Entrepreneurial factors	Leadership factors
1. Business diversification 2. Business models 3. Business advice 4. Business success 5. Business owners' success 10. Business intelligence 11. Business ethics 8. Business practices	1. Entrepreneurial orientation 2. Entrepreneurial behaviours 3. Entrepreneurial education 4. Other entrepreneurial factors	1. Leadership aspects 2. Leadership styles 3. Other leadership aspects

Source: Author's own

Table 4.10 displays BFs that enable the attainment of OP and sustainability of SMEs. Sections: 4.5.7, and 4.6.3 discuss the content of this chapter. Table 4.10 lists EFs that facilitate the achievement of OP and sustainability of SMEs. The content of this table is discussed in Sections: 4.5.8, 4.5.9, 4.5.10, 4.5.11, and 4.6.4 of this chapter. LFs that facilitate OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs are listed in Table 4.10. Sections: 4.5.12, and 4.6.5 discuss the content of this chapter.

Table 4.11: Modernity and sustainable factors enabling the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Modernity factors	Sustainable factors
Technology	Sustainability innovation
Internet	Sustainability practices
Digitalisation	Sustainability performance
Social media	Sustainability management
	Sustainability governance
	Corporate responsibility

Source: Author's own

Table 4.11 shows MOFs that enable the achievement of OP and sustainability of SMEs. The content of this table is discussed in Sections: 4.5.13, and 4.6.6 of this chapter. SFs that facilitate the attainment of OP and sustainability of SMEs are discussed in Table 4.11.
Sections: 4.5.14, and 4.6.7 of this chapter discuss the content of this table.

4.4.4 Findings of research objective 2: Challenges that impede the achievement of organisational performance and sustainability of small and medium enterprises

This section presents the findings of research objective. Tables are used to list the findings. The findings of research objective 1 are discussed in Sections 4.7 and 4.8 of this chapter.

The following tables present the CFs that challenges the achievement of OP and sustainability of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Table 4.12: Corporate factors challenging the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Corporate resources	Corporate behaviours	Corporate practices
1. limited credit facilities 2. Scarceness of resources and limited resources 3. Insufficient premises 4. limited facilities and infrastructure 5. Shortage of professional staff 6. Lack of awareness 7. Intellectual capital 8. Inadequate managerial skills 9. Lack of perception 10. Lack of basic education 11 Lack of Knowledge 12. Lack of corporate culture	1. Lack of passion 2. Lack of screening prospective entrepreneurs 3. Lack of scoring system	1. Lack of market access 2. Innovation and creativity 3. Lack of training 4. Limited access to business development services 5. Failure of the level of recovery, 6. Failure of the business life cycle stage 7. Lack of mentoring, 8. Lack of backing for collateral 9. Low innovative human capital 10. Lack of talent management 11. Lack management involvement 12. Lack of management commitment

Source: Author's own

Table 12 shows various aspects of CFs that enable OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs. The content of this figure is discussed in sections: 4.5.1, 4.5.2, 4.5.3 and 4.6.1 of this chapter.

Table 4.13: Managerial, business and entrepreneurial factors challenging the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Managerial factors	Business factors	Entrepreneurial factors
1. Lack of good financial administration 2. Lack of good management systems 3. Lack of integrated coordination 4. Ethical issues of management accounting 5. Ethical issues of management and 6. Deficiency strategic planning 7. Human resource management systems 8. Poor management	1. Business incubation challenges 2. Business environment	1. Entrepreneurial education 2. Entrepreneurial behaviour 3. Nonlinear entrepreneurial orientation 4. Financial literacy 5. Entrepreneurial characteristics 6. Lack of market intelligence

Source: Author's own

Table 4.13 lists MFs, BFs and EFs that challenge OP and sustainability achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs. The content of this figure is discussed in Sections: 4.7.2, 4.7.3, 4.7.4 and 4.8.2, 4.8.3, 4.8.4 of this chapter.

Table 4.14: Leadership, modernity and sustainable factors challenging the attainment of sustainability and organisational performance and sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

Leadership factors	Modernity factors	Sustainable factors
1. Leadership style 2. Lack of entrepreneurial leadership skills 3. Limited by entrepreneurial leadership capabilities 4. Lack of financial education 5. Unethical leadership	1. Technological challenges 2. Inadequate technology 3. IT adoption 4. Digitalisation challenges 5. Investment in technology 6. IT infrastructure 7. Connectivity 8. Non-use of suitable technology	1. Social challenges 2. Green initiatives 3. Environmental factors

Source: Author's own

Table 4.14 shows LFs, MOFs and SFs that challenge the attainment of OP and sustainability of SMEs and SA SMEs. The content of this figure is discussed in Sections: 4.7.5, 4.7.6, 4.7.7 and 4.8.5, 4.8.6, 4.8.7 of this chapter.

4.4.5 Findings of research objective 3: Phases for sustainability implementation in the organisational performance of small and medium enterprises

No study reveals the phases for sustainability implementation in OP of SMES and SA SMEs. The findings of sustainability aspects implemented in the OP of SMES and SA SMEs are listed in table 4.15 of Section 4.4.7.

4.4.6 Findings of research objective 4: Steps for sustainability integration in the organisational performance of small and medium enterprises

No study reveals the steps for sustainability integration in OP of SMES and SA SMEs. The findings of sustainability aspects integrated in the OP of SMES and SA SMEs are listed in table 4.15 of Section 4.4.7.

4.4.7 Findings of research objective 5: Approach of sustainability balance in the organisational performance of small and medium enterprises

No study reveals the steps for sustainability integration in OP of SMES and SA SMEs. The findings of sustainability aspects integrated in the OP of SMES and SA SMEs are listed in the table below.

Table 4.15 Sustainability aspects implemented, integrated and balanced in the organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises

Sustainability aspects implemented in OP of SA SMEs	**Sustainability aspects integrated OP of SA SMEs**	**Sustainability aspects balanced in OP of SA SMEs**
1. Sustainable development (SD)	1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	1. Triple Bottom Line perspectives
2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	2. Sustainability characteristics	2. Sustainability growth
3. Organisational change	3. Sustainable procurement	3. Sustainability practices
4. Circular economy	4. Sustainability accountability	4. Corporate sustainability practices
5. Lean management	5. Sustainability principles	
6. Sustainable corporate governance	6. Sustainability elements	
7. Sustainable corporate responsibility	7. Sustainable development practices	
	8. Sustainability initiatives	
	9. Sustainability-related targets	

8. Sustainable supply chain management 9. Other related sustainability practices	10. Sustainability management system 11. Sustainability responsibility	

Source: Author's own

Table 4.15 lists sustainability aspects implemented, integrated and well-adjusted in OP of SMEs. The content of this table is discussed in Sections 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11 of this chapter. Section 4.9 discusses the implementation of sustainability in OP of SA SMEs. The integration of sustainability in OP of SA SMEs is discussed in Section 4.10. The integration of sustainability in OP of SA SMEs is discussed in Section 4.11.

The next section provides a discussion related to the enablers of OP.

4.5 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 1a: ENABLERS OF ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are linked to Tables 4.8, 4.9, 4.10. and 4.11 of this chapter.

This section discusses the enablers of OP found in SA SMEs by interpreting the findings of OP dimensions and respective components listed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2 by identifying the gaps in comparison with other findings of other SMEs. In addition, possible gaps in OP dimensions and their respective components were also identified. The findings were interpreted in terms of any OP dimension components, such as OPP, GP, FP, and MP as listed in Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, and 2.2.4.

This section discusses the findings associated with the first **Research Objective 1a** which focuses on the enablers facilitating the attainment of OP of SMEs in South Africa. The discussions are the answer to the following question:

RQ 1a: *What are OP enablers and how do these enablers facilitate the attainment of OP of SMEs in South Africa?*

The discussions include seven types of factors that were considered as the enablers of OP achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs. Those factors encompassed: organisational or corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity, and sustainable factors. Regarding the literature on SMEs, this section only listed all the enablers.

In this section, the discussions simply help to ensure that ***RQ1a*** was answered by the reviewed literature and also to verify the achievement of **Research Objective 1a**.

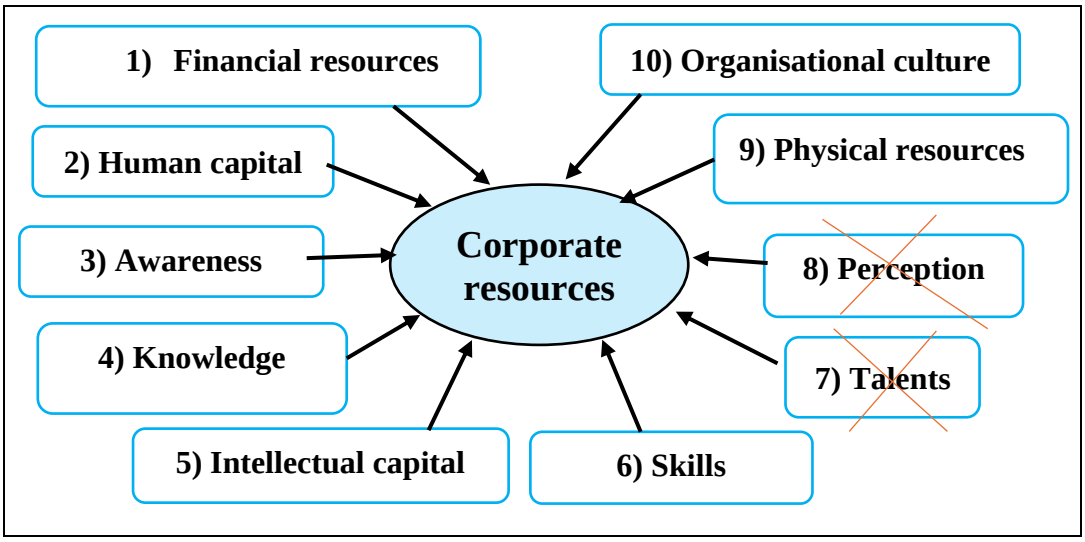
In addition to the above, the ***black bullet*** under the following sections concerns the discussions of SMEs in general while the ***colourful bullet*** concern SA SMEs. Furthermore, the findings of ***RQ 1a*** are discussed in the following subsections:

4.5.1 Organisational or corporate resources as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

This section is linked to Table 4.8 of this chapter.

This section discusses organisational or corporate resources allowing for the achievement of OP in SMEs. The reviewed literature reveals ten forms of corporate resources with the potential to achieve OP of SMEs, as demonstrated below.

Figure 4.8: Corporate resources that enable the achievement of organisational performance of small and medium enterprises



Author's own

Figure 4.8 shows corporate resources that enable the achievement of OP of SA SMEs. The items with red were not found in SA literature. The details about the content of the figure are discussed as follows:

- **Organisational or corporate resources enabling organisational performance achievement small and medium enterprises**

The studies by Grimmer et al. (2017), Hoq and Chauha, (2017) and Sajilan and Tehseen (2019) demonstrated that ***corporate resources*** or capital influenced OP of the realisation of SMEs' performance. In this study, 10 ***corporate resources*** were found in the literature and were categorised as follows: ***financial, physical, human resource (HR), awareness, intellectual capital, skill, perception, knowledge, and talent, as well as organisational culture,*** as discussed below.

- **Organisational or corporate resources enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

According to Marecha (2020), the exclusive organisational competitive advantages of SMEs in SA were created using various useful resources. This might imply that ***resources*** are factors influencing the achievement of various aspects of market performance (MP) in SMEs, such as competitive market, cost, price and non-price competitiveness.

The current standpoint discusses various resources that enabled SA SMEs' performance, which encompass ***financial resources, human capital, awareness, skills, knowledge management, talent management and organisational culture***. The subsequent subsection discusses financial resources enabling OP of SMEs.

- **Financial resources or capital that enables organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Various ***financial resources*** empowered the realisation of OP, such ***as working capital*** in Italian SMEs (Sanchez & Sensini, 2017, Sensini, 2020), in India (Chalmers, et al., 2020b), ***capital structure*** in Greek non-listed SMEs (Dasilas, 2024), SMEs located in different regions of Portugal (Matias & Serrasqueiro, 2017); in Shariah-compliant companies (Md-Yusuf, 2017); in Makassar (Nohong, et al., 2019), ***tax structure*** in Malaysia (Cheong, et al., 2020), and ***financial capital*** in SMEs operating in Enugu State Nigeria (Nwonu, et al., 2017) played an important role in SMEs. Further, access to ***monetary resources*** could support SMEs' survival during the Malaysian crisis (Islam, et al., 2021). This indicates the importance of financial resources in the achievement of OP.

Financial capital at an operational level would enable an investment in the business by acquiring what is needed to run the business, produce goods or create services to be rendered. Financial resources could contribute to the achievement of GP by investing in learning programmes, such as training, workshops, and conferences. The next subsection addresses financial resources in SA.

- **Financial resources or capital enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The literature reviewed on SA revealed the role of ***financial resources*** in SMEs. For instance, the quantitative study conducted in SMEs operating in Pietermaritzburg, the capital city of KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa, recognised business plans, business strategy development, business models, and a good location, as determinants of start-up ***awareness factors*** improving SMEs' ability to access bank finance (Bamata & Fields, 2018).

Furthermore, SMEs' innovation output in family and non-family SMEs was created by ***financial capital*** (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). There was a need for ***financial assistance and provision*** for the performance of small retail companies in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (Kativhu, 2019). Selecting the seed capital source and the required amount as determinants of start-up ***awareness factors,*** improves SMEs' ability to access bank finance of those operating in Pietermaritzburg (Bamata & Fields, 2018).

Financial resources allow the acquisition of various forms of assets needed for innovative operational performance which might improve productivity, products and service delivery quality, and customer satisfaction. The ability to access bank finance might help SMEs to solve financial problems faced by the company, increase investments and run the business effectively. Physical resources are discussed in the subsection below.

- **Physical resources or capital enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Conversely to the above, some types of resources had a positive effect on OP of SMEs, such as ***leveraging resources*** in Chinese SMEs (You, et al., 2023), ***logistics outsourcing*** in Nairobi (Mageto et al., 2018) and ***alter resources*** in Ghanaian SMEs (Acheampong & Hinson, 2019). This implies that ***physical or material resources*** are the influential factors of OP in this sector. Of course, OPP might benefit the most from physical or material resources. Explaining the sufficiency and availability of such capital will help the companies to operate effectively and successfully. In the same way, physical resources in SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Physical resources as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The quantitative study conducted in the Vaal Triangle suggested that SA SMEs' performance could be improved by ***logistics*** integration (Madzimure, 2019). There is a need and suggestion for ***infrastructure upgrades*** for the performance of small retail companies in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province (Kativhu, 2019). Physical resources might shape and enhance the conditions of the workplace environment for convenient business operations. However, human resources (HR) was another corporate resource in the performance of SMEs as discussed below.

- **Human resources (HR) or capital enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

According to Hoq and Chauha (2017) and Ko and McKelvie (2018), in many SMEs performance was supported by ***human resources, also called human capital***; for instance those operating in Portugal (Prange & Pinho, 2017), in Islamic banks (Nawaz, 2019), Pakistan (Kazmi, et al., 2021), Serbia (Simić, et al., 2020), India (Dar & Mishra, 2019), and in manufacturing firms in Enugu State Nigeria (Nwonu, et al., 2017). Moreover, ***HR practices*** in Indian micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) firms (Maheshwari, et al., 2020), ***HR outsourcing*** (Irwin, et al., 2018), and ***social capital*** (Al-Tabbaa & Ankrah, 2018), assisted small organisations to meet their performance, such as Indian SMEs (Dar & Mishra, 2020), and Ghana (Hongyun, et al., 2019).

HR might be counted among the important capitals capable of boosting the achievement of OP, specifically at the operational, financial, growth and market levels since nothing can be done within any organisation without the contribution of human beings. The implementation processes and strategies as parts of HR practices will equip employees with knowledge, new ideas, and networks. These might shape employees' behaviours which will add value to the production of goods or services.

HR outsourcing might influence the achievement of the company's goals, effectiveness, productivity, and products and sales growth which contribute to the improvement of the

organisation. In addition, social capital will encourage employees to work as a team to attain a common objective, such as improved operational success, the building of social connections between employees in the same division and improve relationships between the company members and their suppliers.

HR enabling OP of SA SMEs is discussed below.

- **Human resources as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Human capital was found helpful in SMEs performing in SA (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021; Jonck, 2023). The findings of Venter and Hayidakis (2021) show that ***human capital*** created an innovative output in SMEs. The impact of spending ***human capital revenue*** on financial performance was investigated by Jonck (2023) in the informal sector of South African small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs). Jonck (2023) by using a quantitative method and inferential statistical analysis, revealed the statistical and significant prediction of variance in annual turnover and contribution to net profit by *human capital expenditure*. The influence of HR expenditure on net profit, in turn, could influence return on total assets (ROA) seen through profit indices. Intellectual capital could also be considered as an organisational or corporate resource, as demonstrated in the following subsection.

- **Intellectual capital enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Several studies demonstrated that OP was achieved through ***intellectual capital*** (Chopra, 2017; Romanelli, 2017; Vătămănescu, et al., 2019; Demartini & Beretta, 2020) as in Islamabad and Rawalpindi SMEs (Anwar, et al., 2018) and SMEs in countries, such as Sweden (Tanase & Sihara, 2023), Bali (Prena & Kustina, 2020), Malaysia (Muda, et al., 2020), and other neighbouring states, such as Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia (Kadir, et al., 2018), and Nigeria (Omotoyo, et al., 2020).

Intellectual capital plays an important role in the four OP dimensions in general and particularly in the GP dimension of research, training, and development, likewise in OPP

through novel ideas, innovation, and value creation. However, awareness was another OP enabler discussed below.

- **Intellectual capital as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Although some studies, as discussed earlier, demonstrated the importance of ***intellectual capita****l* as a resource in the OP of SMEs, no study had done so in the context of SA SMEs nor how it could enable the achievement of OP. This calls for future research amongst scholars and practitioners operating in SA. Such investigations might demonstrate the inputs of ***intellectual capital*** in the achievement of FP, OPP, MP, and GP. The following subsection discusses awareness in the OP of SMEs.

- **Awareness enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

In some SMEs, OP was enabled by ***awareness*** as demonstrated by Akpan, et al 's (2020) study conducted in the emerging markets and developing economies sector; likewise, by Gerald, et al. (2020) investigation in Anambra State of Nigeria, and Tay & Aigbogun's (2024) research in Klang Valley province of Malaysia.

Awareness might help the whole organisation to behave responsibly. For instance, at the operational level, it might lead to the achievement of responsible production and service delivery. At the market level, it might lead to the achievement of a responsible relationship with customers and other shareholders. At the financial level, it might lead to the attainment of responsible financial management. At the GP level, ***awareness*** might contribute to the achievement of responsible management of the overall growth within the company. Indeed, ***awareness*** was also discussed in the SA SME context.

- **Awareness as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

A similar result to SMEs in general was also found in SA SMEs by Oseifuah and Manda (2017) who through a structured and administered questionnaire, examined the level of ***awareness*** of state-facilitated sources of finance among owners and managers in 50 South African SMEs. These were in rural communities in the Thohoyandou Central Business District (CBD) in the Thulamela Municipality. The findings reveal a low level of awareness of state-facilitated sources of finance. The author suggested that greater visibility and accessibility are required by several state-facilitated sources of finance to the public. Of course, the lack of ***awareness factor*** might obstruct the company from being funded to run their business. Similarly, the achievement of their goals might never be feasible and realisable.

The ***educational awareness programmes*** targeted management skills (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020), in the same way the selection of seed capital sources and their required amounts are determinants of start-up ***awareness*** factors. Thus, improving SMEs' ability to access bank finance by those SMEs operating in Pietermaritzburg (Bamata & Fields, 2018).

Awareness might contribute to the achievement of performance at the administrative level for instance, helping managers to behave responsibly in terms of financial management. At operational level, for instance, helping employees to behave responsibly by being involved and engaged in all production process. At the market level, awareness might help the company's members to be loyal to their shareholders, suppliers and customers. Awareness might be useful to grow performance as it allows the achievement of learning for managers and employees through programmes, such as workshops, training, and conferences. These might lead to the achievement of innovation in the production process. In addition, similar to awareness, ***skills*** play an important role in realising OP.

- **Skills enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Sariwulan, et al.'s (2020) investigation conducted in the Bulak tourism industry, showed that ***skills*** played a role in the success of SMEs' performance. ***Managerial skills*** are suggested to

significantly affect SME high-performance in Nigeria (Ugheoke, 2021). The findings of this study suggested that resources generated by managers' experience and ***skills*** need to be examined by managers themselves (Ugheoke, 2021). Certainly, ***skills*** might be required at all organisational levels. Skills might lead to the achievement of the overall OP effectiveness. Similar to the discussions of this subsection, the next discussion is the skills of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Skills as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In the same way as other SMEs in the world, ***skills*** allow the achievement of OP in SA SMEs (Kerrin et al., 2017a; Rajaram, 2017). The qualitative study by Rajaram (2017) indicated that financial performance was constructively influenced by ***training*** and ***skills development*** in SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Durban and East London in South Africa. Kerrin et al (2017a) adopted a sequential exploratory mixed method research design to determine the skills needed for South African entrepreneurs to run businesses. They found that start-up, marketing, ***human resource management, financial management, personality, leadership, technical, social, interpersona***l, and ***business management skills*** are needed by entrepreneurs. Skills in the managerial teams lead to good management of the organisation and good performance of the companies, with the potential results of realising the set goals.

Besides the above, when the required ***skills*** are met in the management teams, companies would be shaped by competent people, such as ***skilled marketers***, HR managers, financial managers, and technicians, as well as skilled business managers would make the company performance possible, given the assumption that skilled staff are a key to excellence. Therefore, it might be said that a skilled management team is a key success factor of the attainment of OP of SMEs.

In addition to the above, ***technical skills*** might be considered as an important and valuable input to achieving the operational performance. Indeed, technical skills might be a factor to change, innovation and improvement of the company performance at the operational level with an optimistic impact on the market performance Hence, success in market and operational performance may be key for the growth of the firms' performance.

Furthermore, ***social and interpersonal skills*** facilitate relationship building with people internally at all levels of the organisation, and externally with shareholders, suppliers, and customers. Of course, the relationships between internal and external people might be seen as another key to success to achieve market performance. While skilled management personnel may well facilitate and maintain good interactions with internal and/or external people. ***Skilled management leadership*** might reinforce the relationship between the managerial team and workers, and at the same time, reinforce the network with external people for the achievement of the company's goals. Besides skills, talent is discussed below as a corporate resource enabling OP SMEs.

- **Talent enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Talent contributes to the success of a company, even though talent might need to be well managed for the firm to benefit from it. Talent without management might be considered a loss for the organisation. From the literature ***talent management*** is an important resource for OP achievement in SMEs. For example, ***talent management categories***, including talent roles, talent tasks, and talent indicators supported Polish SMEs in numerous ways (Pauli & Pocztowski, 2019). Park (2022) suggests that the adoption of ***exclusive talent management*** allows for SMEs in South Korea to subsist in a competitive market. Equally, there was much benefit from ***talent management*** in Malaysian SMEs (Hasan & Saufie, 2021), especially the benefits of ***talented employees' specialised skills*** in South Korean SMEs (Park, 2022). ***Talent management*** was not only linked to company performance but also contributed to the performance improvements of SMEs functioning in Uganda (Bagorogoza & Nakasule, 2022).

Similar to the above discussion, employees and competition are components of market performance dimension, as mentioned in Chapter 2 Section 2.2.2. Therefore, the assumption is that talent management is better related to market performance. The consideration of talented employees and the management of their talents enables the achievement of market performance of shareholders' and stakeholders' satisfaction with positive results of gaining the competitive advantage. Moreover, at the operational level, talent management contributes to product making and service delivery. However, as discussed below, knowledge contributed to OP.

Similarly, adding to the discussion, the next subsection focuses on talent and OP of SMEs operating in SA.

- **Talent as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Although some studies, as discussed earlier, demonstrated the importance of ***talent and talent management*** as a resource of OP achievement of SMEs, nonetheless, none of the reviewed studies provided information relative to the ***talent management role*** and its influence or impact on SME performance in SA. This might be considered a necessity for future research. However, knowledge among corporate resources is discussed below.

- **Knowledge enabling organisational performance achievement of SMEs enabling OP achievement of small and medium enterprises**

In alignment with the above findings, ***knowledge*** is also considered very useful as a corporate resource to the realisation of OP of SMEs. To explain, Singh, et al. (2021) used a quantitative approach to focus on open innovation antecedents and results in the SME manufacturing sector in the United Arab Emirates. Their findings suggested that open innovation is influenced by ***top management knowledge value and knowledge-creating*** practices. Ugheoke's (2021) study of SMEs functioning in Nigeria recommended managerial practical knowledge for high performance achievement.

Innovation, along with related concepts, such as ***knowledge*** are mentioned in Chapter 2 Section 2.2.2, from an OPP perspective. Singh, et al. (2021) proposed that ***knowledge***, in all its forms including ***knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowledge management, innovative knowledge and knowledge improvement*** should be incorporated into and linked to OPP to contribute to the achievement of value creation., while innovation might contribute to new ideas, novel strategies, innovative technologies, new-fangled production techniques and products that may lead to quality improvement, influencing the company's growth. Above all, ***management knowledge*** influences OP achievement at all organisation levels. Knowledge in the OP of SA SMEs is discussed in the next section.

- **Knowledge as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Similarl to Singh, et al. (2021), in SA, Chinyamurindi and Gwena (2018) explored ***knowledge management*** effects on innovation capabilities (IC) in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in the Western Cape, SMEs using a quantitative research approach. They found an optimistic effect of knowledge management on SMEs' innovation capabilities. Furthermore, adaptation to market changes and technological development in SA SMEs requires employees' knowledge, education, and competence (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). ***Internal- and external knowledge*** determine successful implementation (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023).

Innovation capabilities lead to innovative and improved production of products, brands, and services. Employees' knowledge should be considered important outputs required in the production process. Well educated employees allow the integration of innovation in the production of goods and services. Competent employees are key for the achievement of the effectiveness of financial, operational, market and growth performance. Internal knowledge might permit the formation of strategies to achieve performance in the organisation, such as profitability, return on sales, return on total assets (ROA), return on investments (ROI), return on equity (ROE), net earnings, and annual net income productivity.

In addition, external knowledge helps in the formulation of strategies related to the achievement of performance improvement at market level, such as improved market share, market development, customer service, customer satisfaction, customer sustainability, profitable customer identification, competitiveness, and shareholders and competitors relationships. In addition to all the corporate resources, perception was the second last resource discussed in this section. Building on the concept of knowledge, the following section discusses perceptions of the achievement of OP of SMEs.

- **Perception enabling organisational performance achievement of SMEs enabling OP achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Perception was found to be the resource aiding the realisation of SMEs performance. To determine workers' overall perceptions of ethical issues in their firms, Rambe and Ndofirepi

(2017) surveyed employees working in two Zimbabwean cities and found that employees desired to engage in ethical behaviour. Accordingly, the authors suggested the improvement of ***employees' ethical perceptions***. Given that behaviours were counted among OPP aspects (Chapter 2 Section 2.2.2), a ***good perception*** of employees might positively influence their behaviour. Good behaviour contributes to employees' performance at an operational level. Ethical perception might empower employees to work while complying with the company principles and norms, which might certainly have a positive effect on production. The inputs of organisational culture to OP are detailed below.

- **Perception as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Some studies demonstrated the importance of ***perception*** as a resource in the OP achievement of SMEs, nonetheless, the same way, such valuable resources like perception were not found in the context of SA studies. This might be a call for scholars and practitioners operating in SA. The following subsection offered the discussions of organisational culture in OP of SMEs.

- **Corporate or organisational culture enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

In line with the above, ***corporate or organisational culture*** has been observed as an influence on the OP of SMEs (Divakara & Surangi, 2018; Mahfouz & Muhumed, 2020) in the following locations; in Taiwan (Wu, et al., 2019), China (Srisathan, et al., 2020), Kuwait (Sawaean & Ali, 2020), Vietnam (Le, et al., 2020; Dey, et al., 2022), Estonia (Reino, et al., 2020), Thailand (Srisathan, et al., 2020), Ecuador (Aguilar-Rodríguez, et al., 2021) Algerian manufacturing SMEs (Mudjijah, et al., 2022), and in Nigeria (Gorondutse & Hilman, 2019; Ugheoke, 2021). Organizational culture might play multiple roles in the company.

Corporate culture shapes SMEs 'identity and the company's behaviors, values, and norms usually reflected in a company's routine activities and employees' actions. In addition, corporate culture might be demonstrated at the operational level of performance, such as the

production process, methods, techniques, systems, products, services, brands, management and employees' language and catchwords.

Various cultures contribute to OP in SMEs, such as ***market culture*** which seems to have influenced innovation in behaviours (Khedhaouria, et al., 2020), ***cultural ambidexterity*** in Organisation's for Economic Cooperation and Development and European Union (Rafailidis, et al., 2017); ***international entrepreneurial culture*** that shaped and supported the attainment of superior international performance (Buccieri, et al., 2021) and ***adhocracy culture*** which fostered proactive behaviours (Khedhaouria, et al., 2020).

Organisational culture might help the staff and employees to work only for the success of the company by complying with its rules and goals. In addition, by observing firms' mission, the attainment of OPP, GP, FP, and MP and certain of the expected outcomes. Cultural ambidexterity might enable changes in companies' culture and allow the espousal of business cultures that permit changes in business practices leading to the successful achievement of performance. Furthermore, the current discussions were centred on offering the overall view of resources enabling OP of SMEs in general, while the next standpoint provides insight into corporate capitals' impact on OP achievement of SMEs operating in SA. In addition, organisational culture is discussed as an enabler of the achievement of OP in SA SMEs in the subsection below.

- **Organisational culture as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In the SA context, innovation-orientated ***organisational culture*** predicted SMEs' innovation output (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). The outcome of innovation might have a positive effect on the operational performance of improving products and services, market performance of customers 'attraction, satisfaction, competitive edge, brand, and company reputation, as well as growth performance of a possible increase of sales and customers. The next section discusses corporate behaviours found to be enablers of OP realisation in SMEs.

4.5.2 Organisational or corporate behaviours as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to the content of Table 4.8 of this chapter.

This section discusses multiple behavioural factors including ***corporate attitude, corporate agility, organisational ambidexterity, and corporate capability*** that lead to the achievement of OP in any SME operating in and outside SA.

- **Organisational or corporate behaviours enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In the reviewed literature of SA SMEs, the impact of some ***corporate behaviour*** was also found in the review literature. Similar to Tende and Ekanem (2018), Gerald, et al. (2020), Yuen and Ng (2021) and Yi, et al. (2023), who obtained similar results to a study conducted on SA SMEs by Govuzela and Mafini (2019). The authors scrutinised ***organisational agility,*** business best practices and SMEs' performance relationships using a quantitative cross-sectional survey. They found that ***technology capability,*** collaborative innovation, ***organisational learning***, and internal alignment were business best practices boosting OP of SMEs. This means that organisational agility and technology capability are the enablers of the achievement of operational performance and growth performance.

Organisational agility might allow SA SMEs to adapt changes in the production process. Organisational learning might support the achievement of performance growth at all levels of small companies. Technology capability might have a positive impact on OP. It can enable the integration of innovation into business practices which might change SMEs into modern companies. In addition, corporate commitment in OP of SMEs is discussed in the following subsection.

- **Organisational or corporate commitment enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Anning-Dorson, et al (2018) found that the creation and management of strong customer participation, competencies of customers, and the improvement of innovativeness outcome was supported by ***involvement capability of service***. OP was implemented by the interaction between ***involvement capability*** and innovativeness. This indicates the positive influence of corporate commitment on market and operational performance. The following subsection discusses corporate commitment in OP of SA SMEs.

- **Corporate commitment enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Similarly, besides ***organisational or corporate commitment*** studied by Makhitha, (2017), not much has been published on this concept. This requires further investigation. The next subsection discusses corporate engagement on the achievement of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Organisational or corporate engagement enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Smith, et al.'s (2022) study revealed interest in SMEs' sustainable development, and power dynamics impede their understanding and implementation of SDGs guidelines. This may indicate that understanding and implementing SD and SDG can lead to the achievement of OP and sustainability. In addition, corporate engagement in OP of SA SMEs is discussed in the following subsection.

- **Corporate engagement enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Corporate engagement is considered as the behaviours contributing to OP of SA SMEs. Hlatywayo and Williamson (2023) recommended SA SMEs' ***engagement in collaborative and strategic partnerships*** with other companies for sustainable growth. Blose and Okeke-Uzodike

(2020) recommended shared business strengths for the Msunduzi Municipality SMMEs' growth. Engagement in collaborative and strategic partnerships enables knowledge, shared experiences between the companies' partners which in turn might bring changes to the business practices that lead to the improvement of permanence. Corporate attitude is the focus of the following discussions.

- **Organisational or corporate attitude enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

According to Dai, et al. (2021) findings, ***corporate attitude*** was the factor enabling the performance of SMEs, specifically financial attitude influenced the business owners' behavioural finance, in a significant manner. ***Corporate attitude*** might be well suited to market performance and seen principally in the management team, and secondly, the employees. The next subsection discusses the findings of corporate attitude in the literature on SA SMEs.

- **Organisational or corporate attitude enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Corporate attitude was not covered in studies conducted in SA. Likewise, no study on SA SMEs mentions ***corporate attitude*** as a factor facilitating the achievement of OP. Hence, this aspect should be considered by researchers in the future. Below, the findings of corporate agility in SMEs is discussed.

- **Organisational or corporate agility enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Conversely to Dai, et al. (2021), ***corporate agility,*** in other words, ***corporate adaptability or flexibility*** supported the performance success of small representatives firms from the South Korean provinces of Daegu and Gyeongbuk (Yi et al. 2023); likewise, the achievement of very few innovative activities in Malaysian SMEs (Yuen & Ng, 2021), activities of small Nigerian businesses in Rivers State (Tende & Ekanem, 2018), and Anambra State in Nigeria (Gerald, et

al., 2020). Furthermore, ***strategic agility*** reinforced performance achievement in South Korean SMEs (Park, 2022).

By referring to the components of OP dimensions (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2), the results seem to have exhibited ***flexibility*** amongst OPP aspects. Therefore, ***organisational agility*** might enable the achievement of OPP in SMEs. Such a behavioural factor might allow the company to adapt to changes in production, products, and services at the operational level, but at the market level, it might imply a change of investors, shareholders, suppliers, and contractors. Customers might also experience changes; in some cases, there is discontinuation of production of certain products. It should be noted that positive change would surely influence the improvement of the overall OP. In the same way, the next section discusses corporate agility in the context of SA SMEs.

- **Organisational or corporate agility enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Organisational agility was found to be significantly influenced by technology capabilities, collaborative innovation, organisational learning, and internal alignment, the four best business practice areas for SME effectiveness. Firm performance was also meaningfully influenced by organisational agility. This might suggest that company performance was meaningfully and indirectly influenced by technology capability, collaborative innovation, organisational learning, and internal alignment. Moreover, their findings suggested that the effectiveness and efficiency improvement of SA SMEs' internal alignment led to the improvement of both agility and overall OP.

Govuzela and Mafini (2019) found that business performance was significantly and positively influenced by the use of ***organisational agility***. They suggested that business success needs agile organisational abilities which help the survival and flourishment of SMEs in times of turbulence and active markets. Likewise, the performance of SMEs is stimulated by the level of enhancement of organisational agility in this type of company. The next subsection deals with corporate ambidexterity.

- **Organisational or corporate ambidexterity enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Another corporate behaviour, ***organisational ambidexterity*** was found to be an influential factor of OP in numerous studies conducted in small organisations from various locations (Laureiro-Martínez & Brusoni, 2018), among others, small United States' firms (Benitez, et al., 2018), United Kingdom SMEs (Huang, et al., 2021), German Mittelstand SMEs (Weigel, et al., 2023), Spanish SME companies (Alcalde-Heras, et al., 2019), and Iranian manufacturing SMEs (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Furthermore, SME firms using CorpTech's directory of companies in technology sectors (Heavey & Simsek, 2017), such as mid-to-high technology in Greek SMEs (Rafailidis, et al., 2017), and likewise, technology-intensive private and public SMEs operating in India (Kiss, et al., 2020).

The ***organisational ambidexterity*** might be useful, particularly for the production process of adapting to change and supporting innovative practices. ***Organisational capability*** might be useful to the whole range of factors linked to OP. Organisational ambidexterity in SA SMEs is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Corporate ambidexterity enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

A study conducted in SA, Jacobs and Maritz (2020) mentioned the current strong ***ambidexterity*** dimensions and sustainable performance relationships, though, no study indicated the role or influence of organisational ambidexterity on OP of SA SMEs.

Similarly, a behaviour like ***attitude and organisational or corporate engagement*** factor were not covered in the literature focusing on the SA context. Therefore, given the importance of ambidexterity in OP, it will be desirable to conduct such a study in the SA context. Consequently, future research may be required to investigate not only organisational or corporate attitude, but also other related aspects, such as financial, environmental, social, and cultural attitudes for behavioural finance, environment, society, and culture. Nonetheless, the next discussion focuses on corporate capability and the achievement of OP in SMEs.

- **Organisational or corporate capability enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Organisational capability is counted amongst key enablers of OP achievement of SMEs. This has been demonstrated by numerous studies like those conducted in America, in Argentina with Argentine agri-food companies, SMEs in Buenos Aires province (Alvarez, et al., 2021), in Europe, amongst Spanish SMEs (Hernández-Linares, et al., 2018), in Asia amongst Indonesian SMEs (Hindasah & Nuryakin, 2020), and in Africa in Ghana (Ofori-Amanfo, et al., 2022). Organisational capability is important in determining the capability of SMEs to improve performance. The next section discusses corporate capabilities and SA SMEs' performance.

- **Organisational or corporate capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

No study on the context of SA SMEs focused on corporate capability. This necessitates research in the future. The next subsection discusses dynamic capabilities in SMEs' performance.

- **Dynamic capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

To add to the above, ***dynamic capability*** was disclosed in American companies and one Canadian enterprise by Quansah, et al. (2022), in UK-based SMEs by Rashidirad and Salimian (2020), in internationalised Malaysian manufacturing SMEs by Ali, et al. (2020a, b), likewise Malaysian SMEs service by Ahmad, et al. (2021), in South Korean provinces of Daegu and Gyeongbuk by Yi, et al. (2023), in Austrian SMEs by Frank, et al. (2017), in SMEs operating in Ghana by Hongyun, et al. (2019). ***Dynamic marketing capabilities*** were found in Turkey SMEs (Akkaya & Qaısar, 2021), Malaysian SMEs (Akkaya & Üstgörül, 2020), South Korean SMEs in Daegu and Gyeongbuk provinces (Yi, et al., 2023), and in manufacturing SMEs operating in Ghana (Quaye & Mensah, 2019).

Dynamic capability plays an important role in adapting to changes leading to innovation and high performance. ***Dynamic marketing capabilities*** help SMEs to become flexible at the MP level. For instance, managers should be able to adapt to new shareholders and stakeholders' requirements, such as novel governmental regulations, changes in contracts, business ethics, and building relationships with newcomers, such as employees, partners, suppliers and customers. Dynamic capabilities in the SA SME context are discussed in the following subsection.

- **Dynamic capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The reviewed literature on SA SMEs discloses some organisational capabilities influencing those organisations, such as: ***dynamic capabilities*** (Mamabolo, et al., 2017; Lavhelani, et al., 2018; Masakale & Pooe, 2022), a bond was disclosed between ***dynamic capabilities*** and personal competencies (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). There is a strong justification that ***dynamic capabilities*** and SME operational performance are positively and significantly connected and lead to an enhanced achievement of business performance (Masakale & Pooe, 2022).

In SA, the link between dynamic capabilities and personal competencies should be seen from the business owners' and HR perspective. Businesses owners should offer the position of manager to people equipped with experience, competencies and skills regarding business goals, vision and mission and to achieve the work in a successful manner, which does not always happen in SA. Most managers of SMEs are the owners' family members and friends. This can lead to the failure of the business.

From a HR perspective, conscientious HR managers should hire courageous, skilled and competent employees with an acceptable educational level. Those employees should also be submissive to the company culture and to their superiors, and perform to achieve performance goals set by the owners or managers. However, friends and family members are the priority when it comes to employment in most small businesses operating in SA

Regarding ***dynamic capabilities,*** the quantitative analysis by Lavhelani, et al. (2018) showed they were positively linked to time, cost, flexibility, innovativeness, and quality of supply chain

performance. This might imply that ***dynamic capabilities*** are linked to FP and OPP. The results of a quantitative study by Pooe, et al. (2022) suggested valuation of competencies and ***dynamic capabilities*** for SA SMEs to achieve efficient cost maximisation. Besides their owned capital, ***dynamic capabilities*** in SA SMEs need to be enhanced by managers (Pooe et al., 2022). Contrary to the present discussions, the following is related to absorptive capabilities in SMEs.

- **Absorptive capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Absorptive capacity was found in Spanish SMEs (Manzanares, 2019), German industrial enterprises (Müller, et al., 2021), Malaysian SMEs (Hughes, et al., 2018), and SMEs of the Yangtze River Delta in China (Zhai, Sun & Tsai, 2018). ***Relationship capabilities or relational capabilities*** might allow the achievement of MP not only through building business partnerships but also building good relationships with employees and the management team, as well as the company itself with customers and other related-shareholders. ***Absorptive capacity*** contributes to innovation in the OPP and MP levels which would certainly lead to growth, benefiting the entire organisation. In line with these findings, absorptive capacity in SA SMEs performance is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Absorptive capacity enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Other capabilities included ***absorptive capacity*** (Masakale & Pooe, 2022) which was significantly and positively related to operational performance (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). Personal business competencies were positively and significantly influenced by ***absorptive capacity*** (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). ***Adaptive capacity*** was also found among SA SMEs (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). These findings demonstrate the need for entrepreneurs to keep reflecting on their own entrepreneurial competencies, such as the ability to deal with unexpected events, creativity, and open-mindedness. The next subsection discusses relational and relationship capabilities in the achievement of OP in SMEs.

❖ **Relational and relationship capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

The findings reveal multiple dimensions of organisational capabilities in the achievement of OP which includes ***relationship capabilities*** in the furniture industry in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara in Mexico (Sanchez-Gutierrez, et al., 2019), while ***relational capabilities*** by Nuryakin (2020) and (Nuryakin, 2021) in the furniture SMEs in the region of central Java. ***Relationship capabilities*** are important since they contribute to the achievement of MP through positive relationship-building between SMEs with their suppliers, investors, partners, competitors, customers, and constructive relationships between top management and employees. In addition, ***relationship capabilities*** spur SMEs to achieve good relationship-building between employees working in the same and with those in different departments. With this in mind, there are two types of relationship capabilities, namely ***internal relationship capabilities*** and ***external relationship capabilities.***

- **Relational and relationship capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

No study revealed relational and relationship capabilities in SA SMEs. This should be considered for future research by academics and companies' managers.

❖ **Technological capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Corporate capabilities are related to technology. To substantiate this, ***technological capabilities*** were found in Portuguese SMEs functioning in the sector of information technology, telecommunications and IT consultancy (Andrade, et al., 2021), Vietnamese SMEs (Trieu, et al., 2023) and in Nigeria (Otache & Usang, 2022). ***Digital platform capability*** was discovered in entrepreneurial SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Sweden (Cenamora, et al., 2019), whereas ***digital marketing capability*** was discovered in Harare, Zimbabwe (Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020). Furthermore, Mollah, et al. (2023) revealed ***IT capabilities*** in South Korean SMEs. Of course, with technological capabilities, a SME might be able to integrate and use modern technologies in their production system and marketing practices.

- **Technological capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

No study revealed technological capabilities in SA SMEs. This requires investigating in the future.

- **Network-related-capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Furthermore, it was found that ***network-related-capabilities*** drove OP success of SMEs in New Zealand (Karami & Tang, 2019), and in new ventures operating in a sub-Saharan African economy (Adomako, et al., 2018). It is also known as ***network capacity*** as mentioned by Nuryakin (2020) in a study conducted in the Wooden Handicraft Export SMEs. Network capability involved: ***alliance management capability*** proven in the UK manufacturing SME industry (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2017b; Al-Tabbaa & Zahoor, 2024), and in Libyan family companies functioning in a politically unstable environment (Al-Tabbaa, et al., 2022; Nasr & Al-Tabbaa, 2023), while ***network partners' capabilities*** were found in SMEs of multinational enterprises (Kim, et al., 2024). ***Internationalisation capability (***Dethine, et al., 2020) encompasses ***international capabilities*** as Degong, et al. (2018) disclosed in Pakistani SMEs.

A networking capability might help SMEs to be connected to others, such as SMEs running the same type of business, SMEs running different types of businesses, investors networks, suppliers' networks, and agencies dealing with people employment. ***Alliance management capability*** connects SME owners or managers to those from other companies and ***network partners' capabilities*** help SMEs to be connected to various business partners. ***International capabilities*** might help SMEs to be connected to businesses, investors, business partners abroad. ***Internationalisation capability*** might assist SMEs to run their business at the local and international level. All these might boost OPP and MP achievement that will have a positive influence on FP and GP. The next subsection discusses network-related-capabilities in the achievement of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Network-related-capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Pooe and Mahlangu (2017) adopted a quantitative method and sampled 300 SME businesses in the Vaal Triangle, South Arica. in the Sedibeng municipal district area to find out if ***collaborative planning capabilities*** influence SME competitiveness and firm performance. Collaborative planning capabilities play an important role in the planning and administration of effective supply chain of SA SMEs. The following is related to market capabilities in SMEs.

- **Market capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Various market related-capabilities had an influence on OP, such as ***entrepreneurial capability*** in small Chinese firms (Xiao, et al., 2020); in high-tech ventures of China (Xiao, et al., 2021b), ***seizing capability*** in South Korean IT SMEs (Min & Kim, 2022), ***market entry capabilities*** in numerous corporate sectors in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Nuryakin & Ardyan, 2018), ***pricing capability*** in Indian SMEs operating in manufacturing and service sectors (Ranjan & Nayak, 2023), ***market knowledge capability*** in export-oriented furniture SMEs from Sukoharjo (Yakin, 2023), ***knowledge management capabilities*** in Malaysian SMEs (Fang, et al., 2021), ***knowledge sharing capabilities*** in Italian manufacturing SMEs (Mazzucchelli, et al., 2021), ***customer bonding capability*** in Indonesian MSMEs (Udayana, et al., 2021), ***involvement capabilities*** in service firms across different subsectors in an emerging economy (Anning-Dorson et al., 2018), ***customer involvement capability*** in the service sector of Ghana (Anning-Dorson et al., 2018), and ***competitive capability*** in Nigeria (Ugheoke, 2021). SME capabilities related to customers should be considered as the enabler of MP achievement in terms of profitable customers' identification, effective customers' service, customers' satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. The discussions of market capabilities in SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Market capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Despite the above findings, no literature on SA SMEs covered ***market capabilities***. However, the findings of performance capabilities in OP of SMEs are discussed below.

The following is related to performance capabilities in SMEs.

- **Performance capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Besides market capability mentioned above, the findings by Yi et al. (2023) conducted in the South Korean provinces of Daegu and Gyeongbuk disclosed that the performance of SMEs was influenced by ***operational capability,*** also known as ***operations capability***, which influenced the performance of Indonesian SMEs (Saragih, et al., 2020). ***Innovation capabilities*** influenced performance in Canadian SMEs (Mellett, et al., 2018), Italian manufacturing SMEs (Mazzucchelli, et al., 2021), Irish SMEs (Mellett, et al., 2018), Austrian SMEs (Hwang, et al., 2020), Chinese manufacturing SMEs (Ali, et al., 2020a), and in Chinese exporting SMEs (Zhang & Hartley, 2018). This demonstrates the importance of performance capabilities to provide SMEs with valuable capacity to reach their OPP, such as outputs, sales growth, effectiveness and efficiency.

The next subsection discusses performance capabilities in the achievement of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Performance capabilities enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The findings of the semi-structured interview by Furawo and Scheepers (2018) identified factors impacting the innovation of SMEs in Cape Town that suggested that a competitive advantage and growth can be reinforced by sustainable innovation founded on ***innovative capacity***, which in turn can help the survival of the companies. Innovative capacity might help SA SMEs to reach their performance at the operational level by adapting to new structures,

methods, systems and processes, the integration and implementation of novel technologies, the value creation on employees' knowledge which will lead to value added to production, product and service quality. Other capabilities in SMEs performance are discussed in the subsection below.

- **Other capabilities enabling organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

In additional to all listed capabilities above, other forms of capabilities were also found, which include: ***capacity building*** in Vietnam (Safari & Saleh, 2020), ***top management capabilities*** in Pakistan (Khattak & Shah, 2020b), likewise ***managers' intangible capabilities*** in Pakistan (Ying, et al., 2019), ***logistics capability*** in Nairobi (Mageto, et al., 2018), and ***capability maturity model*** in Nigeria (Omotayo, et al., 2020), ***organisational or corporate engagement*** with the Sustainable Development Goals in rural and urban locations in the UK (Smith, et al., 2022.), and ***organisational or corporate commitment*** to service firms across different subsectors in an emerging economy (Anning-Dorson, et al., 2018), ***chain integration capabilities*** (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017)., ***supply chain capabilities*** (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017), and ***innovative capacity*** (Furawo & Scheepers, 2018; Chinyamurindi & Gwena, 2018.; Mogashoa & Selebi, 2021). Mogashoa and Selebi (2021) concentrated on ***high' innovation capacity entrepreneurial capabilities***, ***risk management capabilities and capabilities*** and ***lagging capabilities. Chain integration and supply chain capabilities*** have an influence on SME competitiveness and firm performance in the Vaal Triangle, South Arica (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017). SMEs with all the mentioned capabilities can reach its performance in all its dimensions.

- **Other capabilities enabling OP of South African small and medium enterprises**

In additional, the positive relationship between ***strategic stance*** and SME performance, more precisely, operational performance, was disclosed (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). To investigate the degree of ***innovation capacity*** and the differences in the innovation capabilities across firm size, Mogashoa & Selebi (2021) targeted South African consulting engineering firms using a quantitative methodology. While Pooe & Mahlangu (2017) adopted a quantitative method and sampled 300 SMEs businesses in the Vaal Triangle, South Arica in the Sedibeng municipal

district area to find out if ***collaborative planning capabilities*** influence SME competitiveness and firm performance. Further, SME performance was impacted by these factors, and likewise SMEs own performance was enhanced by supply integration tools, collaborative planning, and supply chain capabilities development. The next section discusses in the achievement of OP in SA SMEs.

4.5.3 Organisational or corporate practices as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.8.

The current section discusses ***organisational or corporate practices*** permitting OP attainment of SMEs, and similarly OP success in SA SMEs. These corporate practices were categorised as follows: corporate networking, innovation and creativity, organisational learning, and corporate engagement. The following subsection discusses the networking of small companies' performance.

- **Corporate networking enabling organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

Sefiani, et al. (2018) mention that ***networking*** of small companies has become a component of success. The authors added that it builds relationships between personnel and management, enables small firms' network connection with entrepreneurs' networks, as well as cooperation, for instance, a sustainable competitive advantage was achieved in MSMEs in Indonesia (Jatmiko et al., 2021). Networking of small companies will support weak SMEs and help to sustain then and to operate even longer.

Multiple kinds of corporate networks were found helpful in the performance of SMEs. To illustrate, ***internationalisation*** in UK SMEs manufacturing industry (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2017b) was the strength of SMEs (Sundström, et al., 2020), ***international networking*** in Chinese SMEs (Lin, et al., 2020), ***international new ventures' (INVs) networking resources*** export start-up apparel firms in Bangladesh (Faroque, et al., 2017), ***inter-organisational networks*** in U.K.-based internationalised SMEs (Stoian, et al., 2017), ***inter-organisational***

collaboration (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2017a), ***inter-organisational networks*** of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in South Tyrol in Italy (Kofler & Marcher, 2018). SMEs might benefit from the inter-organisational networks through knowledge and experiences sharing.

Network resources in SMEs in Taiwan (Liu & Yang, 2020) might include ***network partners*** in SMEs of MNEs (Kim, et al., 2024)***, network competence*** of Malaysian entrepreneurs of manufacturing SMEs from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (Tehseen, et al., 2019), ***network competency*** of SMEs in China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Ali & Li, 2021), ***network competence*** in Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs of wholesale businesses, Malaysian Chinese wholesalers from the states of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (Sajilan & Tehseen, 2019), Malaysian entrepreneurs of manufacturing SMEs from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (Tehseen, et al., 2019), likewise, SMEs run by Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs (Tehseen, et al., 2018). Network competence helps SMEs to interact with competent, skilled and qualified partners. It might also help in recruiting competent employees from agencies with excellent competences.

In addition to the above, ***networking*** in industrial SMEs in Ireland and Canada (Sefiani, et al., 2018), ***cross-border e-commerce*** in Swedish e-commerce SMEs (Tolstoy, et al., 2023). ***international e-commerce*** in Swedish retail SMEs (Tolstoy, et al., 2021), and ***foreign business relationships*** in Swedish SMEs (Melén-Hånell, et al., 2018; Tolstoy, 2019). Moroever, ***efficient negotiation*** can help SMEs endure a crisis (Islam, et al., 2021). This showed that networking can be built using novel technologies like the internet.

Regional integration was practiced in Botswana SME perspectives on Southern African trade (Marandu & Thomas, 2017), ***networking and internationalising*** in SMEs in New Zealand (Karami & Tang, 2019), ***international network*** in emerging market small and medium-sized enterprises (ESMEs) operating in China (Xiao, et al., 2020b), SME ***internationalisation*** in the United Kingdom (Saridakis, et al., 2019), in Swedish SMEs (Tolstoy, et al., 2022), in Australian and New Zealand SMEs (Gerschewski, et al., 2020), UK based manufacturing SMEs (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021), ***inter-organisational collaboration*** (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2020), ***cooperation and internationalisation*** in small Italian wineries (Festa, et al., 2017), ***collaborations and internationalisation*** of SMEs (Zahoor, et al., 2020), in SMEs based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Zahoor, et al., 2023), and ***collaboration with the firms' stakeholders*** in industrial SMEs (Grama-Vigouroux, et al., 2020). This indicates that a small

enterprise cannot only build networks with local shareholders and stakeholders, but it can also create partnerships abroad.

The building of networks and partnerships abroad might have positive results in operational and market performance. At the operational level, SMEs might acquire the materials and adopt techniques needed for production from abroad which will allow the innovation and improvement of their goods and services. At the market level, SMEs might import and export goods and services. Importing will help in the diversity of local and international goods and services. The exporting of goods and services would be significantly advantageous to financial performance. In addition, SMEs will attract various investors and customers, both locally and abroad. Local networks and international partners will enable SMEs to meet local and international business performance standards, and in particular the delivery of their goods and services.

SMEs networking can also be managed through ***network embeddedness*** as observed in Ghana (Dogbe, et al., 2020); ***network diffusion*** in Ghana (Acheampong & Hinson, 2019); ***horizontal and vertical connectedness*** (Turkina & Van Assche, 2018), ***alliance management*** in UK manufacturing industry SMEs (Al-Tabbaa & Zahoor, 2024), in Lybian family firms (Nasr & Al-Tabbaa, 2023), and family firms operating in a politically unstable environment, again in the Libyan context (Al-Tabbaa, et al., 2023). The good management of built networks might influence the SMEs' performance constructively.

Furthermore, other SMEs networking forms included ***entrepreneurial networks*** of SMEs based in Jordan (Abu-Rumman, et al., 2021), and ***corporate networks*** in Canadian and Irish micro-firms (Mellett, et al., 2018), in high-tech ventures in China (Xiao, et al., 2021); and in manufacturing firm vendors of automotive supplies (Fernando, et al., 2022). In addition to this, s***ocial networks*** in companies in the four German speaking countries of Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, and the German-speaking part of Switzerland (Eggers, et al., 2017; Bai, et al., 2021) might be seen as an efficient way of not only running business as a group but achieving the organisational goals of each company that is part or member of the network. ***Active social networking*** in the Pakistani services and manufacturing sector (Fatima & Bilal, 2020). It might be assumed that entrepreneurial networks would certainly allow SME managers and owners to interact with other entrepreneurs locally and abroad. Corporate networks might facilitate the coalition with other companies, whereas social networks and active social networking might

require the use of a social media platform. Networking SA SMEs is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Networking enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Network practices were among the enablers of SA SMEs' performance. Business ***collaboration*** was used for the performance of small retail companies in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (Kativhu, 2019). Through the quantitative method, Pfanelo (2017) collected data from 450 SMEs in SA to scrutinise the influence of supply chain partnership on collaboration, collaboration on integration, integration on relationship commitment and relationship commitment on performance. The author discovered that manufacturing SMEs' collaboration, integration, relationship commitment and performance were positively and significantly influenced by supply chain performance. however, the most significant impact was integration rather than collaboration and relationship commitment.

Makhitha (2017) determined the ***relationship marketing practices*** and impact on the company performance of 102 independent retailers by adopting a quantitative approach and targeting South African small independent retailers in Johannesburg, specifically in Soweto. Although marketing was found to have an impact on performance, the number of customers increased due to the involvement of independent retailers in ***collaborative relationships***, in the same way, profit and market share increased due to independent retailers' involvement in longstanding associations. Yet, the author discovered severe competition faced by independent retailers from large retailers and proposed relationship marketing strategies with suppliers to gain a competitive advantage.

The perceived influence of ***buyer-supplier relationships*** on firm performance was examined in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) retail industry located in Gauteng province using a structured quantitative questionnaire (Loury-Okoumba & Mafini, 2018). Supplier performance was found to be significantly and positively influenced by ***buyer-supplier engagement, commitment, communication, and cooperation***, as well as trust which was strongly applied. The constructed connection between buyer-supplier relationships and firm performance was significantly mediated by supplier performance. In short, business

performance was driven by supplier performance. The achievement of internal innovation processes required SMEs in SA to be engaged in ***collaborative and planned partnerships*** with other businesses (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023).

Supplier partnering exchanges vital information and access to valuable resources, allowing innovation to gain access to additional resources, and shared risks and costs are enabled by ***strategic networking*** and logistics integration (Madzimure, 2019). In the same way, ***strategic networks*** determined the successful implementation of open innovation of SMEs operating in the city of Pietermaritzburg (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023). ***Strategic network*** and logistics integration influences on company performance in the Vaal Triangle SMEs was surveyed by Madzimure (2019) with owners and managers of 137 SMEs by using a quantitative research design. Logistics integration on company performance was found to be strongly optimistic and important. At the same time, logistics integration and OP were constructively and meaningfully influenced by ***strategic networks***. The author suggested that business networking could be advantageous to SA SMEs by remaining competitive. Similarly, Hlatywayo and Williamson's (2023) findings revealed that ***strategic networks*** played a significant role in the successful implementation of open innovation in SMEs operating in Pietermaritzburg.

Mlotshwa and Msimango-Galawe (2020) studied the influence of diverse ***networking***, including ***networking activities*** and the perceived importance of networking on SA SME performance operating in the Gauteng province. A quantitative approach with cross-sectional research was designed. Competitiveness among SMEs was greatly improved by ***networking***. their performance, which enhanced entrepreneurs' involvement in more ***networking activities and relationship conservation***. Moreover, networking influences SMEs performance from the business, managerial or social perspective. However, the risk of overestimating networks should be considered. Other corporate practices are discussed in the following subsections.

- **Innovation and creativity enabling organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

Besides networking, ***innovation*** and ***creativity*** were found to be influential practices to the realisation of OP of SMEs. This was proven by numerous studies (Sanchez-Gutierrez, et al., 2019; Hanifah, et al., 2019; Dey, et al., 2019; Corral-de-Zubielqui, et al., 2019; Abdulkader, et

al., 2020; Srisathan, et al., 2020; Feranita, et al., 2020; Veronica, et al., 2020; Singh, et al., 2021; Adu-Gyamfi, 2022), in various SMEs, for example service firms across different subsectors in an emerging economy (Anning-Dorson, et al., 2018), and various countries, for instance in German industrial enterprises (Müller, et al., 2021), in Malaysia (Yuen & Ng, 2021), in Vietnam (Chowdhury, et al., 2022), in Australian SMEs (Corral-de-Zubielqui et al., 2019), in various forms, such as an ***innovation model*** in Malaysian SMEs (Islam, et al., 2021), ***innovation strategy*** in Germany (Müller, et al., 2021), ***marketing innovation*** in Guadalajara-Mexico (Sanchez-Gutierrez, et al., 2019), ***entrepreneurial innovativeness*** among Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs (Sajilan & Tehseen, 2019), ***financial innovation*** in Indonesia (Feranita, et al., 2020), and in Nigeria (Effiom & Edet. 2022), and ***dimensions of innovation*** from manufacturing companies in Harare, Zimbabwe (Mabenge, et al., 2022). Furthermore, ***exploration-exploitation of opportunities*** helped SMEs to endure throughout the global crisis (Islam, et al., 2021). This might lead to improving FP, OPP, MP and GP.

Innovation might include the following: ***innovation activity*** (Zahoor, 2017), like ***open innovation*** in UK (Freel & Robson, 2017), in Thai and Chinese SMEs (Srisathan, et al., 2020), in the manufacturing sector SMEs of the United Arab Emirates (Singh, et al., 2021), and the Nigerian oil and gas industry (Akinwale, 2018), ***innovation adoption*** in Nigeria (Adeoye, et al., 2019), ***innovation culture*** among Malaysian SMEs (Hanifah, et al., 2019), ***innovation enhancement*** in Malaysia (Yuen & Ng, 2021), ***innovation performance*** (Freixanet, et al., 2019) and ***employee creativity and innovation*** (Nyawu & Schultz, 2020). However, Zhang, et al. (2022) stated that innovation can indirectly enhance SMEs' profitability through social performance, while environmental performance does not. Social performance is directly linked to market performance, while environmental performance is linked to OPP, therefore, environmental performance might contribute to profitability through innovation at the operational level. The next subsection discusses innovation and creativity in SA SMEs' performance.

- **Innovation and creativity enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Besides the above, ***innovation*** could also be counted amongst OP enablers in SA. Mogashoa and Selebi (2021) stated that SA SMEs' success should be determined by ***innovation*** capacity

as one of the largely overlooked factors made up of different capabilities. In the same way, Matekenya and Moyo's (2022) findings suggested innovation as a crucial factor for SMME expansion and growth. Likewise, Matekenya and Moyo (2022) explored the effect of ***innovation*** on SA SMME performance. They adopted a quantitative approach through the collection of data from a survey conducted by the World Bank. The empirical analysis revealed a positive and significant effect of research and development (R&D) expenditures on the performance of enterprises with higher sales, high growth, or larger companies. The performance of smaller companies with low growth was promoted by the introduction of new products or services. The authors suggested that SA SMEs introduce not only novel products, but also production approaches with minimal financial costs.

In addition to the above, ***innovative performance*** was found to be the driver of product performance of SMEs in the Gauteng province (Elizabeth, 2023). Through a case study approach and mixed methods design, and an interaction with SME owners, managers/supervisors and employees. Hlatywayo and Williamson (2023) aimed to find out whether the successful implementation of ***open innovation*** in SMEs located in the city of Pietermaritzburg, in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. was influenced by internal knowledge, external knowledge and strategic networks. The successful implementation of open innovation in SMEs was found to be determined by the significant role played by internal and external knowledge.

SME partnerships through ***open innovation initiatives*** should be incentivised and stimulated by the policies fashioned and enacted by policymakers and the government (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023). Chinomona (2023) surveyed 225 managers and staff members from SMEs in the Gauteng province, South Africa to examine the antecedents of new product performance. The author's findings suggested the enhancement of market orientation, risk taking and innovative performance on new product performance and excellence of SA SME managers

The statistical analysis of the searched determinants of commonly utilised ***innovation output*** that influences perceived financial performance of family and non-family SMEs in SA, discovered that SA SMEs' financial performance was improved by innovation (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). In addition, product, process, organisational and ***marketing innovation*** were parts of innovation output and linked to and perceived financial performance, however, no changes were noticed in innovation practices (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). Therefore, one

might assume that human and financial capitals contributed to the innovative operational performance of SA SMEs.

Furthermore, Govuzela and Mafini's (2019) findings suggested that the effectiveness and efficiency improvement of SA SMEs' ***collaborative innovation*** improves both agility and overall OP. Innovation and performance enhancement could be supported by the ***open innovation*** adoption by SA SMEs (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023). Innovation inclusion in the operational performance means the creation of novel products or improvement of the existing products, which might allow the attainment of financial performance, such as profit realisation, and market performance achievement through the gaining of a competitive advantage enabled by novel products. However, no study on SA SMEs mentioned creativity and OP achievement. Therefore, it might be necessary to consider further research on the topic. Nevertheless, organisational learning was the other corporate enabler.

- **Organisational learning enabling organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

Studies by Baba, et al. (2017), Hernández-Linares, et al. (2018), Assadinia, et al. (2019), Martinez-Costa, et al. (2019), Kelliher, et al. (2020), Mwakalikamo, 2020, Xiao, et al. (2020), and Ahmad, et al. (2021) demonstrated the valuable inputs of ***organisational learning and training*** to OP of SMEs. Organisational learning might support the upgrade of all performance dimensions since the knowledge acquired by managers and employees, if applied will bring positive changes in the whole company. In like manner, the organisational learning role in SA SMEs is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Organisational learning enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In similar fashion to the above, ***organisational learning*** was also found to be the enabler of OP in SA SMEs. To illustrate this, Govuzela and Mafini's (2019) findings suggest the effectiveness and efficiency improvement of SA SMEs ***organisational learning*** for the improvement of both agility and overall OP. Venkatachalam, et al. (2020), in their study of

four SMEs' projects (which deliver energy efficiency projects in South Africa) supported the link of a suitable learning culture to develop the social level of communities by sharing knowledge using strategies and techniques. The next section concentrates on discussions relative to managerial factors and the achievement of OP of SMEs.

4.5.4 Managerial factors as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.9.

The managerial role has direct and indirect influences on high performance achievement among small firms (Ugheoke, 2021). Of course, various managerial aspects led SMEs to realise their OP, such as managerial behaviour, practices, and other managerial aspects.

- **Managerial behaviour factors as enablers of organisational performance in small and medium enterprises**

Management behaviour might cover several aspects**.** To illustrate***, management support*** (Jin & Lee, 2020), ***managerial competencies*** (Veliu & Manxhari, 2017; Zacca & Dayan, 2018; Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2019; Mashavira & Chipunza, 2021), ***management personality*** (Antoncic, et al., 2018), ***managerial capacity*** (Jin & Lee, 2020), ***managerial external capabilities*** (Alcalde-Heras, et al., 2019), ***managerial innovation capacity*** (Jin & Lee, 2020) and ***top management's commitment*** in Indonesia (Latan, et al., 2018). Managers with the mentioned behaviours might be considered key success factors for individuals' performance, leading to the achievement of the entire company's performance. The next subsection concentrates on managerial behaviours that influence the achievement of OP of SA SMEs.

- **Managerial behaviour factors as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Corresponding to the above, managerial behaviours contributed to SMEs' performance realisation in SA. ***Managerial competencies*** were categorized by Irene (2017) and Dzansi,

Chipunza and Mashavira (2019). In addition, ***trust and commitment*** could have led to SMEs' success during the COVID-19 era (Omoruyi & Makaleng, 2022). However, other managerial behaviours mentioned in the above section were not found in the literature reviewed on SA SMEs. This might be a sign for further investigation. Besides managerial behaviour, managerial practices are discussed below.

4.5.5 Managerial practice factors as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.9.

This section discusses managerial practices facilitating the OP success of SMEs and SA SMEs. These factors include ***planning, strategy, supply chain management (SCM), total quality management (TQM) and other managerial practices.*** Strategy is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Planning in the organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Planning might be considered a booster for the attainment of SMEs' performance. The study by Donkor, et al. (2018) showed the performance development of operative SMEs in Ghana through the consistent application and contributions of strategic planning methods. Planning is the key to achieving companies' goals, which are linked to their various performance levels.

- **Planning for the organisational performance attainment of South African small and medium enterprises**

Pooe and Mahlangu's (2017) survey emphasised that the performance of Sedibeng municipal SMEs was impacted by a ***collaborative planning*** survey. Gomera, et al. 's (2020) strategic planning formulation, implementation, evaluation and control were positively linked to FP of the SMMEs operating within the Buffalo City Metropolitan in the Eastern Cape province of

South Africa. However, SA SMEs should also establish a constructive connection between strategic planning formulation and their operational, market and growth performance.

- **Strategy for the organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Turner and Endres (2017) stated that SME owners' achievement in the US was done through ***strategies***. Similarly, common ***strategic actions,*** such as employee motivation, capacity building, and communications boosted the performance of SMEs in Nepal (Rai et al., 2020). Likewise, Islam, et al. (2021) suggested that the identified ***strategic initiatives,*** such as well-organised negotiation and exploration-exploitation of opportunities could help Malaysian SMEs to survive the crises they were going through. Furthermore, the revitalisation of strategies was suggested as an approach for Malaysian SMEs to remain competitive (Islam et al., 2021). Equally, business strategy was suggested for the sustainable competitive advantage of Indonesian SMEs (Jatmiko, et al., 2021).

Greater performance and every stakeholder's welfare enhancement could be reached through a ***sustainable corporate strategy*** (Hristov, et al., 2022). According to Buul and Omundi (2017), SME performance in Nairobi was significantly and positively influenced by ***competitive strategies.*** Nonetheless, finance accessibility and the capability of competitive performance achievement in Lesotho's SMEs were positively and significantly influenced by ***market-driven strategies*** (Amadasun & Mutezo, 2023). This demonstrates that strategy has been a driver of OP of SMEs.

- **Strategy in the organisational performance attainment of South African small and medium enterprises**

However, in SA, Dhlamini's (2022) study focused on understanding ***strategies*** in business. The qualitative study findings by Isabirye and Hewitt (2021) unveiled that ***strategies*** were key factors for SME growth in the high-profile women-owned mid-scale enterprises in East Africa. Croucamp and Mathibe (2019) developed a strategy framework for black female entrepreneurs' businesses. Mudara and Mafini (2022) surveyed the strategy implementation effect on women-owned SMEs' financial performance and survival in the Gauteng province. As a result,

financial performance was predicted by strategies, while an insignificant satisfaction of operational strategy was observed. However, their survival was meaningfully foreseen by corporate, business, and operational strategies.

Besides the above, other types of strategies were used to achieve the OP of SA SMEs. Strategies were used for the performance of small retail companies in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (Kativhu, 2019). Chinyamurindi and Gwena's (2018) investigations suggested the development of ***strategies*** for enhancing SME growth, which requires lecturers, management researchers, managers, policymakers, and SME owners in SA. The qualitative study by Baadjie and Manyaga (2023) revealed that ***lockdown survival strategies,*** like market penetration and development, and diversification, were intended to be used by SMMEs working in Johannesburg City to survive after COVID-19's challenging market circumstances. Similarly, by adopting a literature method, Van Scheers (2018) inspected ***strategies of global recession*** for SMEs in emerging markets in SA. The author revealed that the companies that survived cost-reducing and growth recession had strategies to survive the global recession. Competitive ***strategies*** positively affected the high performance of Tshwane-based SMEs as demonstrated by Kgoetiane, et al.'s (2021) survey.

Omoruyi and Makaleng (2022) adopted a quantitative approach to investigate ***resilient strategies*** based on SMEs' COVID-19 supply chain (SC). Their results suggested that SMEs enhance their relationship with suppliers and consumers through commitment, communication, and trust. Makhitha's (2019) findings recognised the support of the positive impact of ***marketing strategy*** on companies' sales and profitability and called for the consideration of the market and the formulation of an effective and effectual marketing strategy by small craft producers in SA. The reviewed literature by Chipunza and Mupani (2019) proclaimed the existing link between employee resourcing strategies, ecological influences, and business performance among small restaurants. In addition to the above, supply chain management (SCM) is discussed in the following subsection

❖ **Supply chain management in the organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

To the contrary, ***supply chain management*** was also a managerial factor with the potential of enabling SMEs' performance. Saragih et al. (2020) declared that reaching the capability of companies in waste removal, the management of adequate inventory levels, leveraging synergies' management and their capability in competing effectively in the international market is made possible by supply chain management (SCM). These aspects might certainly be linked to the OP of companies. In other words, SCM might play various roles in the realisation of the OP of SMEs. Indeed, several studies that focused on SMEs have proved this assertion, as discussed below.

SCM practices influenced the Indonesian companies' performance directly (Saragih, et al., 2020), as proven in the Malaysian case study of halal-certified SMEs (Muhamed, et al., 2023), likewise, ***SCM strategy*** (Arijanto, 2022), for instance, in firms functioning in the city of Guaymas Sonorain in Mexico (Valdez-Juárez & Gallardo-Vázquez, 2018), similarly in SMEs in Korean small firms (Lee, 2021), as well as in MSMEs operating in Africa (Wube & Atwal, 2024). To emphasise this, Saragih, et al.'s (2020) findings reveal that a sustainable competitive advantage could be achieved through SCM.

Supply chain management in the organisational performance attainment of South African small and medium enterprises

In SA, other managerial factors with the potential of boosting the performance of OP in ***supply chain management (SCM)*** through multiple uses, such as ***supply chain (SC) integration*** (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017), ***supply development*** (Mbambo & Hove-Sibanda, 2024), ***SC partnership*** (Pfanelo, 2017), ***SC resilience strategies*** (Omoruyi, et al., 2022), and ***SC collaboration*** (Blom, et al., 2022). The reduction of costs related to supply chain management leads to greater competitiveness results (Lavhelani, et al., 2018). The quantitative study by Pooe and Mahlangu (2017) revealed that SMEs' performance in the Sedibeng municipal district area was impacted by supply chain integration and supply chain capabilities. While Lavhelani, et al. (2018) claimed that the monitoring of SC performance led to competitiveness augmentation.

Moreover, the findings by Lavhelani, et al. (2018) suggested the improvement of company performance and ***individual supply chains*** by SME managers and owners.

- **Total quality management (TQM) in the organisational performance attainment of small and medium enterprises**

Quality ***management stages*** according to Yang's (2018) study conducted in Taiwanese SMEs, usually implement more practices, but the adoption of total quality management (TQM) is an exception, as the government in Taiwan provided financial motivation to support SMEs to implement the quality practices of TQM. Based on the analytical results of the implementation-effectiveness analysis model, SMEs need to raise the implementation levels of the critical practices, which will result in a degree of effectiveness, for example, lean production, process capability control, customer relationship management, and performance management. Likewise, ***quality management (QM)*** profits have the potential to enable the OP of SMEs. The study conducted by Diaz and Sensini (2020) justified that the attainment of operating profits in Argentinian SMEs was led by the quality management practice. With this in mind, it was anticipated that ***TQM*** would be found to be the enabler of SMEs.

Certainly, TQM was used for SME performance (Imran, et al., 2018a; Imran, Aziz, et al., 2018b) in various forms for instance, ***TQM adoption*** (Sule, et al., 2017), ***TQM practices*** (Sawaean & Ali, 2020), ***TQM model*** (Arunachalam, et al., 2018), ***TQM tools*** (Ahmad, et al., 2018), and various SMEs (Pfau, 1989), and its benefit has been proclaimed. Indeed, implementing TQM led to effective lean production, process capability control, customer relationship management, and performance management in Taiwanese SMEs (Yang, 2018). Similarly, companies' processes and management through customer needs' satisfaction, productivity improvement, and a competitive edge, as well as quality, in the pursuit of TQM adoption (Pfau, 2019; Imran, et al., 2018b). Granted that TQM has proven to lead to the success of OP in SMEs, for instance, a sustainable competitive advantage was accomplished in Indonesia (Saragih, et al., 2020).

Although TQM was found to be used by most large companies (Yusof & Aspinwall, 2020), however, in respect of SMEs, the fear of losing the contract with large firms encourages them to introduce quality into their system (Singh et al., 2008).

- **Total quality management (TQM) in the organisational performance attainment of South African small and medium enterprises**

Quality service improved SMMEs operating in the Diepsloot township located in Johannesburg (Scholtz, et al., 2023). However, few publications mentioned TQM among factors enabling SME performance in SA. Therefore, this is an opportunity for scholars to conduct future research. Furthermore, the next subsection lists other managerial factors facilitating the achievement of an SME's performance.

❖ **Marketing as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Marketing (Bocconcelli, et al, 2018) and its relative aspects, such as ***marketing capabilities*** (Jin & Cho, 2018; Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020), ***marketing performance*** (Nuryakin & Ardyan, 2018), and ***marketing practices*** (Kanu, 2019; Mashingaidze, et al., 2021) positively influenced OP of SMEs. In a like fashion, it facilitated SA SMEs' performance.

- **Marketing as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Similarly to the above, marketing was found to be an enabler of OP in SA SMEs. To illustrate, ***marketing practices*** (Makhitha, 2017), ***experiential marketing*** (Okanga, 2018), ***marketing strategies*** (Makhitha, 2019), and ***place marketing*** (Goldberg, et al., 2019) had an impact on the business performance of SMEs operating in SA.

❖ **Human resource management RM as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Human resource management (HRM) in all its forms can enable the performance of SMEs. For instance, studies by Kim and Christensen (2017), Opengart and Germain (2018), Uraon and Gupta (2020), Jang and Ardichvili (2020), Halim and Halim (2021); Siclen-Luna, et al. (2021); Fang, et al. (2021), Park, et al. (2021) and Philpot and Aguilar (2021). To demonstrate,

Zhang, et al. (2019) implemented sustainable ***HRM,*** while green HRM was adopted by Setiawan (2023). The following subsection deals with HRM in SA SMEs' performance.

- **HRM as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Using qualitative research based on interviews (Asoba & Patricia, 2021) investigated the effective role ***human capital management*** had on the growth of entrepreneurial ventures. Human resources were found to be the drivers and essential for the growth of entrepreneurial ventures. According to the authors, growth requires the centralisation of operative human capital management by entrepreneurs. In the same way, HRM**,** regardless of SMEs' constraints, contributes to their success through ***HRM practices*** (Nyamubarwa & Chipunza, 2019), ***human capital investments*** (Kele et al., 2017), and ***HRM strategies*** (Moni & Chipunza, 2021). Contrary to HRM, the next subsection discusses accounting as another OP enabler of SMEs.

❖ **Accounting as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

The impact of ***accounting information systems*** on organisational performance was identified in SMEs operating in Saudi Arabia (Trabulsi, 2018). Likewise, ***accounting information*** in the success of SMEs in Zimbabwe (Nyathi et al.,2018; Ahmad & Al-Shbiel, 2019). The adoption of ***activity-based costing*** supported SMEs' performance in the Tanzanian manufacturing sector (Molela, et al., 2023), and similarly, ***cash flow*** (Vicente & Ivanov, 2017). In the same way, in the subsequent subsection, accounting and the performance of SA SMEs are discussed

- **Accounting as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Financial management supported OP success. Similarly to Islam et al. (2021), as mentioned earlier in the above subsection, some studies conducted in SA revealed that ***financial management*** was a requirement for running SMEs in SA (Kerrin, et al., 2017a). In the same way, ***financial management*** training enhanced financial self-efficacy (Kirsten, 2018). ***Cost efficiency*** was suggested to be considered as an engaging strategy by SA SMEs' managers

(Pooe et al., 2022), ***sourcing accounting services*** (Oosthuizen, et al., 2020), and ***activity-based costing implementation*** (Fourie, et al., 2018). In addition to this, management accounting was another enabler of SMEs' performance success, as discussed in the following subsection.

- **Management accounting as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

The ***management of economic capital*** was suggested for the survival of Malaysian SMEs at a time of crisis (Islam, et al., 2021), and similarly, ***access to and management of financial resources*** helped SMEs to endure throughout this crisis (Islam, et al., 2021). ***Management accounting (MAC)*** brought considerable inputs to OP success in SMEs. To demonstrate, SME users of MAC tools perform better than non-users of MAC in various SMEs, for instance, hotel SMEs in Buenos Aires (Alvarez, et al., 2021). Likewise, ***management accounting information and innovation capability*** influenced small enterprise performance in Vietnam (Le, Nguyen & Hoang, 2020).

In the same way, ***MAC practices*** were significantly linked to Malaysian SMEs' performance (Ahmad, 2017). In Nigeria, MAC practices were linked to firm performance, such as costing systems, budgeting systems, performance evaluation systems, decision support systems, and strategy management accounting systems (Osim, et al., 2020), which are financial components. This might indicate that MAC practices can facilitate the achievement of FP in SMEs. Moreover. Osim, et al. (2020) suggested using MAC practices to guarantee the businesses' profitability. In South Jakarta, it was observed that production practices were augmented due to the use of environmental management accounting (Syarif & Novita, 2019).

Various MA forms enabled OP achievement, such as ***MAC use*** in Mexico (Ruiz & Collazzo, 2020), ***strategic MAC*** (Kalkhouran, et al., 2017), ***MAC information*** (Khan, et al., 2021), which led to the attainment of effective and efficient business operations (Al Lami, et al., 2019), ***MAC system (MAS)*** (Özer & Doğru, 2021), which allowed managers to operate firms effectively (Liem & Hien, 2020), while ***MAC services*** influenced SMEs' financial performance of commerce, service, and manufacturing industries in Ghana (Gyamera, et al., 2023). ***MAC methods*** were found to be connected to SMEs' performance in Ghana (Gyamera, et al., 2023).

- **Management accounting as an enabler of organisational performance achievement South African small and medium enterprises**

MAC has played an immense role in the realisation of the successful performance of SA SMEs. For instance, studies by Msomi, et al. (2019), Vilakazi, et al. (2020), and Msomi, et al. (2020) examined ***MAC practices (MAPS)*** in SMEs. The quantitative study by Msomi, et al. (2019) examined the critical ecological issues influencing MAPs' implementation by manufacturing SMEs functioning in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. ***MAPs*** adoption was influenced by internal and external ecological issues. They suggested that the enhancement of business performance needs the identification of the most appropriate MAPs and the incorporation of such practices into firm operations. Msomi et al. (2019) suggested the integration of the majority of MAPs into business operations of manufacturing SMEs functioning in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

In contrast to the above, although ***MAC practices*** were found to be useful to the investigated clothing and textile SMEs, however, those practices were considered advantageous to them (Vilakazi, et al., 2020). In their investigations in manufacturing SMEs operating in eThekwini metropolitan of SA, Msomi, et al. (2020) discovered that firm age, years in operation, lack of government business incubation and technology adoption challenged and obstructed its use in this sector.

4.5.6 Other managerial factors as enablers of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.9.

This section listed other managerial factors that were not mentioned in the above discussions but have the potential of enabling the success of OP of SMEs and SA SMEs. Other managerial practices found in the literature are enumerated in the subsection below.

- **Other managerial practices in small and medium enterprises**

Some ***managerial practices*** that influenced OP of SMEs included ***managerial relationships*** (Vătămănescu & Mitan, 2024), ***management orientation*** (Freixanet, et al., 2018), ***strategic***

management (Adeyemi, et al., 2017; Arıcıoğlu & Yiğitol, 2021a. b), ***management innovation*** (Vanhaverbeke, 2017) or ***managerial innovation*** (Jin & Lee, 2020), ***investment*** (Gherghina, et al., 2020; Seo & Kim, 2020), ***compensation*** (Rehman, et al., 2018), ***decision-making*** (Koranteng, et al., 2017; Khaliq, et al., 2021)**,** and ***management control systems*** for instance, in agricultural SMEs (Vitale, et al., 2020). Furthermore, ***advanced management practices*** boosted the OP of companies operating in the industry. Likewise, other managerial practices found in the literature covering SA SMEs are discussed in the subsection below.

Other managerial practices in the South African context

Using a quantitative method, data collection and analysis, Saah and Musvoto (2020) administered questionnaires to 400 small business managers in the North West province of South Africa to set an ***effective management approach*** for the success of SME improvement. They found that only 41.5% of SMEs in the North West province are likely to be sustainable. They asserted that in SA, SMEs that were managed effectively succeeded and became sustainable (Saah & Musvoto, 2020). Innovation and the sustainable positive performance of the case study SME in South Africa were supported by ***innovative managerial practices*** (Ungerer & Buys, 2021). Similarly, the improvement of innovation and competitiveness of SMEs in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) required ***management practice involvement*** in SMEs (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021).

Furthermore, according to Furawo and Scheepers (2018), a better strategy should involve minor changes or improvements in the existing products or services for the superior SME population in Cape Town. ***Employment*** relationships and ***work engagement*** were demonstrated to be the predictors of performance management systems in the workplace (Maake, et al., 2024). However, ***diversity management practices*** influence companies' performance (Sealome & Chipunza, 2021).

Conversely to the above, other managerial aspects that boosted OP in this industry included ***compliance or management*** (Oosthuizen, et al., 2020), ***incubator management*** (Van der Spuy & Antonites, 2022.), self-motivation and intrinsic motivational ***compensation*** factors (Ncube & Zondo, 2018), ***strategic decision-making*** (Van Wyk & Venter, 2022), ***management innovation*** (Ungerer & Buys, 2021), and ***strategic management*** (Bag, et al., 2021). Surely, SA

SME management and success require ***strategic management*** and effective management measures from their managers (Saah & Musvoto, 2020). ***Managerial structures*** of SA SMEs were flexible (Van Scheers, 2018). Nevertheless, the next section focuses on business factors facilitating the OP of SMEs.

4.5.7 Business factors as enablers of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.10.

This section conversed business factors permitting OP achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs. Those factors encompassed ***generic business diversification, business diversification, business models, business advice and advisors, business success and business owners' success***. Hence, the discussions are related to the business diversification of SMEs.

- **Business diversification enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Business diversification is another business aspect that influences OP of SMEs. This factor included ***geographic diversification*** (Bodlaj, et al., 2020), ***product diversification*** (Kariuki, et al., 2018; Azman, et al., 2021), ***innovation diversity*** (Verreynne, et al., 2019), ***financing diversification*** (Ramcharran, 2017), ***gender diversity*** (Salloum & Jabbour, 2019), ***management team diversity*** (Guo, et al., 2018), and ***entrepreneur's experiential diversity*** (Spanjer & Van Witteloostuijn, 2017), and in addition to these, ***business ethics*** (Gurayah, 2024) and ***ethical practices*** (Turyakira, 2018; Sulaeman, et al., 2019; Alcívar, et al., 2020; Waheed & Zhang, 2022). The next subsection focuses on business diversification in the achievement of OP of SA SMEs.

- **Business diversification enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In a like fashion to the above discussions, the reviewed literature on SA SMEs unveiled that ***business diversification*** (Orlu et al., 2017) supported business success in SA. For instance,

specialisation and stock diversification were used for the performance of small retail companies in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (Kativhu, 2019). However, business models enabled the success of SMEs' performance as discussed below.

- **Business models enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Furthermore, business models could also influence the performance of SMEs. This was proven by Arbussa, et al. (2017), Müller, et al. (2021), Lu, et al. (2023), Brunelli, et al. (2023), and Santini and Kretschmer (2023), who implemented ***business models.*** Indeed, the implementation of many forms of business models was revealed, such as ***green business models*** (Le & Mohiuddin, 2024), ***international business models*** (Child, et al., 2017), ***ambidextrous business models*** (Randhawa, et al., 2021), but mostly ***business model innovation*** (Anwar, 2018; Dahooie, et al., 2020; Lopez-Nicolas, et al., 2020; Heider, et al., 2021). The next subsection discusses business models from the SA context.

- **Business models enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Notwithstanding the subsection above, business models supporting OP attainment were not found in the reviewed literature on SA SMEs. Thus, scholars may need to consider this aspect for future research. Business advice and advisors on the performance of SMEs are discussed below.

- **Business advice and advisors enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

It was found that ***business advice*** (Blackburn, et al., 2018; Stawasz, 2019), likewise ***business advisors*** (Stoian, et al., 2018; Bertschi-Michel & Sieger, 2021; Chikweche & Bressan, 2021) boost the OP success of SMEs. The next subsection discusses business advice and advisors in the context of SA SMEs.

- **Business advice and advisors enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Nevertheless, in the discussions above, no study on SA SMEs revealed both business advice and advisors in the attainment of the OP of SA SMEs. Therefore, consider these aspects of business by potential scholars and postgraduate students. The next subsection discusses business intelligence in the achievement of OP in SMEs.

The literature reviewed on business in SA SMEs and OP did not cover both these aspects, business advice and business advisors. This might be a suggestion for future research. However, business success and business owners were also important in the OP attainment of SMEs. However, the next subsection discusses business success and business owners' success in the OP realisation of SMEs.

- **Business success and business owners' success enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Despite the above discussions, OP achievement was determined by ***business success*** (Amato, et al., 2017). For instance, in Malaysian SMEs (Radzi, et al., 2017; Tehseen, et al., 2019; Tehseen, et al., 2019), Iranian SMEs (Banadaki & Youngan, 2018), Bangladesh SMEs (Tehseen, et al., 2023), Ghanaian SMEs (Gyimah, et al., 2019), and ***business owners' success.*** As an example, the success of small-business coffee shop owners in Duval County, Florida, determined performance control and enhancement (Turner & Endres, 2017), while firm performance and financial performance were significantly supported by successful owner-managed SMEs in Malaysia (Ng & Kee, 2018). At the same time, the following subsection discusses similar findings in SA SMEs. The above discussions demonstrated the positive impact of business factors on SMEs' performance achievement in SA. However, a factor of business owners' achievement was not revealed by many studies, including SA.

- **Business success and business owners' success enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In a similar fashion to the above section, ***business success*** was key for the SMEs' performance in SA (Irene, 2017). Yet, conversely to the above discussions, no study conducted in SA SMEs mentioned business owners' success in the achievement of SA SMEs, therefore, this might be considered as a topic for future research. However, the inputs of business intelligence to OP of SMEs are the focus of the following subsection.

- **Business intelligence enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Business intelligence (BI) was found in several publications on OP success of SMEs (Tatić, et al., 2018; Cheng, et al., 2020; Paradza & Daramola, 2021; Yang, et al., 2022). Indeed, business intelligence might include various factors as several reviewed studies revealed that multiple forms of business factors facilitated the attainment of OP in SMEs, such as ***business orientation*** in Ghana (Issau & Soni, 2019), ***business planning*** (Yuliantini, et al., 2023), ***business strategy*** (Lestari, et al., 2020; Latifah, et al., 2021), such as a ***green business strategy*** (Leonidou, et al., 2017), ***business incubation*** for example in China (Du & Wang, 2019), Nigeria (Iyortsuun, 2017; Akpoviroro, 2021; Ezemezuo, 2023; Adelowo & Oladimeji, 2024), and Nairobi (Momanyi, 2023; Momanyi, et al., 2023), and ***business incubation process*** (Ayatse, et al., 2017; Sohail, et al., 2023), like ***business incubators roles*** (Franco, Haase & Rodini, 2023) and ***business incubators influences*** (Sedita, et al., 2019; Schutte & Barbeau, 2022; Khraim, 2024), as well as ***business management*** in Namibia (Mukata, et al., 2018), and ***business process management*** (Kasim, et al., 2018; Fischer, et al., 2020). Similarly, the next subsection focuses on business intelligence in SA SMEs.

- **Business intelligence enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Analogous to the above, ***business intelligence*** influenced SME performance in SA (Gomwe, et al., 2023). Moreover, in SA, the achievement of OP could also be seen through business factors, including ***business process management*** (Meintjes & Van Rensburg, 2022), and ***business planning*** (Marecha, 2020). Of course, ***business planning,*** regardless of its weakness and the nonexistence of entrepreneurial education, SME success and improvement in the Gauteng Province (Marecha, 2020). ***Business goals and strategy*** could have led to SME

success during the COVID-19 era (Omoruyi & Makaleng, 2022). There is a suggestion for ***business training*** for the performance of small retail companies in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (Kativhu, 2019). Nevertheless, business ethics and practices in SMEs are discussed below.

- **Business ethics and practices enabling organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Besides the above, ***business practices*** were also found (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2017), for instance, ***green business practices*** (Aghelie 2017; Ashton, et al., 2017), and business factors' influence on OP was also found in SA SMEs as discussed below.

- **Business ethics and practices enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In line with the above other business factors inputs to OP of SMEs in SA were also revealed by the findings, for instance, ***business ethics*** found by Chazireni (2019), and likewise, business ***practices*** discovered by Cronje, et al. (2017), Govuzela and Mafini (2019) and Chidau, et al. (2022). Of course, Govuzela and Mafini (2019) assumed that the SMEs' performance improvement in SA was enabled by its appropriate and significant alignment with business best practices. Besides the business factors discussed here, entrepreneurial orientation was another factor that palyed a role in the achievement of OP in SMEs as mentioned in the following section.

4.5.8 Entrepreneurial orientation enabling the achievement of organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.10.

This section discusses entrepreneurial orientation in the achievement of OP as found in the literature based on SMEs and those on SMEs operating in SA. Entrepreneurial orientation included ***market orientation*** and ***other entrepreneurial orientation aspects***. The following subsection discusses entrepreneurial orientation in SME performance.

- **Entrepreneurial orientation as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

A large number of acknowledged the roles and influences of ***entrepreneurial orientation*** on SMEs (McGee & Peterson, 2019; Bouhalleb, 2024), for example in the United States (Irwin, et al., 2018; Hunt, 2021), in Brazil (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021), Mexico (Lomberg, et al., 2017; Alvarez-Torres & Lopez-Torres, 2019), Philippines (Roxas, et al., 2017), Sweden (Lomberg et al., 2017), Russia (Bogatyreva, et al., 2017), Netherlands (Lomberg, et al., 2017), Russia (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021), Norway (Lomberg, et al., 2017), Finland (Bogatyreva, et al., 2017; Lomberg, et al., 2017), Spain (Arzubiaga, et al., 2018; Arzubiaga, et al., 2018; Hernández-Linares, et al., 2018; Verdú-Jover & Estrada-Cruz, 2023), Lithuania (Sedziniauskiene & Sekliuckiene, 2020), Italy (Leonelli, et al., 2022), and Central Europe (Palmer, et al., 2019). This might indicate the importance of ***entrepreneurial orientation*** in the performance of operative SMEs in western countries.

Australia (Lomberg et al., 2017), New Zealand (Karami & Tang, 2019; Karami, et al., 2023) were the other areas in the world where ***entrepreneurial orientation*** was applied for the attainment of SMEs' performance. Similarly, some other studies conducted outside of the western part of the world discovered that ***entrepreneurial orientation*** led to SMEs performance success in Asian countries like China (Tang, et al., 2017; Zhai, et al., 2018; Yin, et al., 2020; Hiung, et al., 2019; Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021; Jean, et al., 2024), India (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021), Malaysia (Hughes, et al., 2018), Korea (Jin & Cho, 2018), Indonesia (Sutrisno, et al., 2019; Yaskun, 2021; Mashuri & Moko, 2024; Merung & Susanti, 2024; Hendri, et al., 2024), Jordan (Abu-Rumman, et al., 2021; Zighan & Abualqumboz, 2022), Taiwan (Hughes, et al., 2022), Thailand (Vaitoonkiat & Charoensukmongkol, 2020a), Japan (Hughes et al., 2022), Pakistan (Khattak & Ullah, 2021; Jan, et al., 2024), and Sri Lanka (Raisal, et al., 2021).

Corresponding with the above, ***entrepreneurial orientation*** was among drivers leading to the success of SME performance in Tunisia (Khedhaouria, et al., 2020), Ethiopia (Buli, 2017), Ghana (Hongyun, et al., 2019; Hongyun, et al., 2019; Amaniampong, et al., 2024), Nigeria (Adegbuyi, et al., 2018; Lawal, et al., 2018; Ibidunni, et al., 2018; Eniola, 2020; Pulka, et al., 2021). Likewise, in a sub-Saharan African country (Donbesuur, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the successful implementation of ***entrepreneurial orientation*** in the performance of SMEs was found in various companies from different sectors, ranging from in new ventures in manufacturing industries (Wang, et al, 2017; Khattak & Ullah, 2021), the steel fabrication industry (Vaitoonkiat & Charoensukmongkol, 2020a), creative industry (Idawati & Sumartini, 2020), the micro-business industry (Al-Awlaqi, et al., 2021), restaurants (Yaskun, 2021), and local and family business (Floris & Dettori, 2024).

According to the ***international entrepreneurial orientation,*** the following factors were deemed important (Clark & Covin, 2021), role of domestic market competition, technological and marketing capabilities on SME's export performance (Jin & Cho, 2018) and ***green entrepreneurial orientation*** (Ameer & Khan, 2023). The subsequent subsection discusses entrepreneurial orientation from the SA perspective.

- **Entrepreneurial orientation as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The reviewed studies on ***entrepreneurial orientation*** focused on entrepreneurship factors enabling OP of SMEs in SA (Mamabolo, et al., 2019; Dele-Ijagbulu, et al., 2020; Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021; Mtshali & Chinyamurindi 2021; Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). In SA, Mamabolo, et al.'s (2019) study among 158 SMEs in SA revealed that ***entrepreneurial orientation*** contributed to SME performance. Their findings advised the integration of leadership development into entrepreneurship training institutions' programmes, and the implementation of entrepreneurial orientation by all employees in the company, as well as the adoption of the entrepreneurial culture for the entrepreneurial orientation strategies towards entrepreneurship, and the involvement of employees in the organisation goals setting by the company leader. In the same way, by using a quantitative methodology, Mtshali & Chinyamurindi (2021) surveyed ***entrepreneurial orientation*** and business performance relationships in small businesses in South Africa. Business performance was found to be meaningfully connected to entrepreneurial orientation, which was mediated by a competitive advantage. Through a quantitative approach, Dele-Ijagbulu, et al. (2020) questioned ***entrepreneurial orientation*** dimensions and their relationship with employment growth. They

found that ***entrepreneurial orientation*** was significantly linked to OP and employment growth. Moreover, ***entrepreneurial orientation*** strengthened the business performance of SMMEs and augmented backing to medium-sized businesses (MSBs) in SA.

The assessment of ***entrepreneurial orientation*** and discontinuance rates of business in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), Davies and Van Vuuren (2021) revealed the positive correlation between early-stage entrepreneurship and business discontinuation, and at the same time, the negative correlation between early-stage entrepreneurship variables. ***entrepreneurial orientation*** should improve SMEs' innovation and competitiveness in these countries (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021). Meanwhile, ***risk-orientated entrepreneurial orientation*** foresees SMEs' innovation output in SA (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). Nevertheless, other market orientation aspects are discussed below.

- **Market orientation as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Market orientation led to OP attainment of SMEs in the worldwide, for instance, in Mexico (Acosta, et al., 2018), Ecuador (Didonet & Diaz-Villavicencio, 2020), Scotland (Wasim, et al., 2024), Spain (Hernández-Linares, et al., 2018; Hernández-Linares & Kellermanns, 2021), Portugal (Fernandes, et al., 2020), Turkey (Anil & Shoham, 2017), Jordan (Al-Shourah, 2021), Thailand (Thongsri & Chang, 2019), Malaysia (Udriyah, et al., 2019; Maaodhah, et al., 2021; Ismail, et al., 2021; Bahari, et al., 2023), Sri Lanka (Gunawardana & Aravinda, 2021), Bali (Idawati & Sumartini, 2020; Wahyuni & Sara, 2020), Vietman (Ngo, 2021; Ngo & Mada 2021), Yemen (Alhakimi & Mahmoud, 2020), Ethiopia (Buli, 2017; Hassen & Singh, 2020), Ghana (Bamfo & Kraa, 2019), and similarly in different forms of companies, like local SMEs (Kazakov, et al., 2021), MSME business (Julyanthry, et al., 2021; Ikramuddin, et al., 2021), Finnish SMEs (Länsiluoto, et al., 2018), textile manufacturing (Hutahayan, 2021), and restauration (Yaskun, 2021). In a like fashion, market orientation in SA SMEs is discussed below.

- **Market orientation as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Similarly, in SA, ***market orientation*** and response were the predictors of SA SMEs' innovation output (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). SA SMEs' innovation output was predicted by ***market orientation*** and response (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). Elizabeth (2023) found that the innovative performance and product performance of SMEs in the Gauteng province were driven by ***market orientation.*** Furthermore, besides ***entrepreneurial orientation*** and ***market orientation*** discussed in the above and this current subsection, there exist other entrepreneurial factors which are listed in the next subsection

- **Other entrepreneurial orientation aspects as enablers of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Other entrepreneurial orientations influencing OP of SMEs included ***strategic orientation*** (Grimmer, et al., 2017; Palmera, et al., 2017; Song & Jing, 2017; Park & Seo, 2018; Angaga, 2018; Beliaeva, et al., 2020; Muafi, 2020; Anwar, et al., 2021; Tang, et al., 2021; Le & Ngoc-Khuong, 2024), ***innovation orientation*** in hotels (Mohedano-Suanes, Ret al., 2021; Hiung, et al., 2019; Mohedano-Suanes, et al., 2021; Aslam, et al., 2023) and Ethiopia (Zone & Ayinaddis, 2023), ***learning orientation*** in a sub-Saharan African market (Assadinia, et al., 2019; Sawaean & Ali, 2020; Assadinia, et al., 2019; Hutahayan, 2021; Wahyono & Hutahayan, 2021), ***stakeholder orientation*** customer orientation in Thailand's SMEs (Vaitoonkiat & Charoensukmongkol, 2020a), customer, competitor and employee orientation (Vaitoonkiat & Charoensukmongkol, 2020b) while ***competitor orientation*** influenced significantly SMEs' performance and competitive advantage (Ogundare & Van der Merwe, 2024), ***environmental sustainability orientation*** developed novel venture performance and stakeholder integration (Amankwah-Amoah, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the following section discusses entrepreneurial orientation aspects covered by SA SMEs.

- **Other entrepreneurial orientation aspects as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Conversely to the above discussions, still, some of the entrepreneurial orientations' aspects found in other SMEs, such as ***strategic, innovation, learning, stakeholder, and competitor orientations*** were not covered by the reviewed literature on SA SMEs. Therefore, the roles and influence of those strategic, innovation, learning, stakeholder, and competitor orientations on SMEs operating in SA must be identified in future research. Besides, entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation was also found to be an enabler of OP achievement. The next section discusses entrepreneurial behaviours in SMEs.

4.5.9 Entrepreneurial behaviours as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.10.

This section discusses entrepreneurial behavioural aspects in the achievement of the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs. Those aspects encompassed ***entrepreneurial resilience, entrepreneurial intention***, and ***entrepreneurial competencies***.

- **Entrepreneurial behaviours as an enabler organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

The results by Badiru (2024) revealed that ***entrepreneurial behaviours*** (***entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial competency, entrepreneurial mindset, and social network***) had a significant and positive impact on the performance of SMEs. Whereas, according to Badiru (2024) and Agyapong, et al. (2021) SMEs' performance is significantly and positively impacted by ***entrepreneurial behaviours***. Of course, one might be said that there exist various forms of behaviours in entrepreneurship leaders and staff members that can enable the achievement of OP of SMEs which include ***strategic entrepreneurship behaviours*** (Hughes, et al., 2021), ***innovative behaviours*** (Hughes, et al., 2018), ***entrepreneurs' improvisational behaviours*** (Adomako, et al., 2018), ***financial behaviours*** (Kostini & Raharja, 2020; Eniola &

Iwu, 2022), ***enterprises' employee training behaviours*** (Zhang, et al., 2019); ***export behaviours*** (Lukason & Vissak, 2020), and ***planned behaviours*** (Mfazi & Elliott, 2022).

- **Entrepreneurship behaviours enabling organisational performance achievement of South African SMEs**

The results from the SA context have not provided information about strategic entrepreneurship behaviours, innovative entrepreneurship behaviours, entrepreneurs' improvisational behaviours and financial entrepreneurship behaviours in SME performance, which might require further investigation. However, Neneh (2017) suggested that ***planned behaviours*** are necessary for considering these behaviours when recruiting employees.

- **Entrepreneurial resilience as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Furthermore, ***entrepreneurial resilience*** was an entrepreneurship factor that played a significant role the achievement of SMEs' performance (Branicki & Sullivan, 2017; Schepers, et al., 2021; Santoro & Messeni-Petruzzelli, 2021; Sharma & Rautela, 2022; Smith, et al., 2022; Khurana, et al., 2022; Zighan & Abualqumboz, 2022; Marcazzan & Campagnolo, 2022; Gianiodis, et al., 2022; Alabi & Ogidi, 2023; You, et al., 2023; Tagliazucchi, et al., 2023; Zighan & Ruel, 2023; Verreynne, et al., 2023; Iyke & Onuoha, 2023; Tumaku & Agbeko, 2024; Pathak, et al., 2024; Gottschalck, et al., 2024; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024; Tumaku & Agbeko, 2024). Indeed, ***resilience*** was found to be the key for the continual competitiveness of SMEs, for instance, in Malaysia (Islam et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial resilience is imperative to SMEs as it might allow the business to be run and achieve its performance goals regardless of existing challenges and other undesirable conditions and uncontrollable circumstances, such as global crises and natural disasters. Furthermore, the inputs of entrepreneurial resilience in the OP of SA SMEs are conversed in the next subsection.

- **Entrepreneurship resilience as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Through a survey, Fatoki (2018) investigated the connection that existed between ***entrepreneurial resilience*** and the success of SMEs in SA. Thus, the results indicated that there were noteworthy and constructive links between entrepreneurial resilience and individual, and likewise, between entrepreneurial resilience organisational success. The qualitative study by Kativhu (2019) conducted in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa revealed that there was a clear consideration of the successive practice of performance measures and were led by the ***resilience measurement*** of youth-owned small retail companies.

- **Entrepreneurial intention as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises**

Some of the reviewed literature focused on SMEs, such as Rosique-Blasco and Madrid-Guijarro (2018); Ebdane and Samar (2019); Ahadi and Kasraie (2020); Martins and Perez (2020); Osadolor, et al (2021); Taghizadeh and Riyami (2022) and Khan, et al. (2024) unveiled the positive influence of ***entrepreneurial intention*** on the success of SME performance. Good entrepreneurial intention leads to a company's success through profitability, productivity, market share and training, learning and growth achievement. Furthermore, the following subsection discusses the findings on entrepreneurial intention in SA SME literature.

- **Entrepreneurship intention as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The reviewed literature revealed the following: ***entrepreneurial intention*** led to the improvement of the start-up of SA SMEs (Botha & Taljaard, 2019a). On the contrary, ***entrepreneurial intention*** was positively linked to value creation of SA SMEs (Botha & Taljaard, 2019a), while there was also a constructive association between ***entrepreneurial intention*** and innovation in SA SMEs (Botha & Taljaard, 2019a). The connection between ***entrepreneurial intention*** and the self-efficacy of SMEs in SA was noteworthy, optimistic, and bidirectional (Botha & Taljaard, 2019a). In contrast, such a relationship was found to be

insignificant (Botha, et al., 2019). The following subsection discusses the entrepreneurial competencies of SMEs' performance.

- **Entrepreneurial competencies as enablers of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Several previous studies on SMEs demonstrated that ***entrepreneurial competencies*** facilitated the realisation of their OP (Ibidunni, et al., 2017; Hashim, et al., 2018; Bagheri & Vagnoni, 2018; Ibidunni, et al., 2018; Zainol & Al Mamun, 2018; Tehseen, et al., 2019; Lukason & Vissak, 2020; Wahyono & Hutahayan, 2021; Pulka, et al., 2021; Ibidunni & Ogundana, 2021; Ismail, 2022; Labo, 2024; Al Koliby, et al., 2024; Coudounaris, et al., 2024; Mokbel, et al., 2024). In addition, a similar result was found in SA SMEs.

- **Entrepreneurship competencies as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Entrepreneurial competencies were accepted as vital for business achievement and its understanding in SA SMEs (Irene, 2017). While the business start-up of SA SMEs was improved by ***entrepreneurial competencies*** (Botha & Taljaard, 2019a). ..

Entrepreneurial competencies might help SA SME performance in all its dimensions. At the FP level, ***entrepreneurial competencies*** might equip SME owners or managers with skills and capabilities which will help manage the finance of the company effectively by not confusing the company finances, minimising unnecessary expenditures, organising activities that can increase their assets and profitability in terms of ROS, ROI, ROE, ROA, annual net income, and by paying their obligations, such as debts and taxes. At the OPP level, owners or managers can hire skilled and competent employees with impeccable behaviour and capable of adapting new technologies to improve the production of goods or services.

At the MP level, competent entrepreneurs will be capable of keeping and building good relationships with their old and new stakeholders, shareholders, and customers, by demonstrating their loyalty towards them and ensuring customer satisfaction. In addition, competent entrepreneurs respect their competitors by avoiding any distortion of

competitiveness. At the GP level, entrepreneurial competency might assist managers to grow employees with training, learning and education programmes. This will have a positive influence on the community's acceptance of product and service delivery, efficiency, sales growth, innovation and company improvement. Furthermore, the next section discusses entrepreneurial education and OP achievement.

4.5.10 Entrepreneurial education as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.10.

This section discusses entrepreneurial education aspects that facilitate the achievement of OP of SMEs and SA SMEs.

- **Entrepreneurial education in small and medium enterprises'**

Entrepreneurial education (Adeniyi, et al., 2023) could enable the achievement of the OP of SMEs through ***support programmes*** (Fihlani, et al., 2023), ***edu-finance*** (Purwanto & Anwar, 2022; Anwar, 2023). Furthermore, ***entrepreneurial learning*** in Italy (Secundo, et al., 2017) and ***entrepreneurship training*** in Namibia (Mukata, et al, 2018). Furthermore, the following subsection discussed entrepreneurial education and OP achievement in SA SMEs.

- **Entrepreneurship education as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

By using a quantitative method and explorative approach, Marecha (2020) investigated the perceptions of Gauteng-based entrepreneurs on the contribution of business planning and ***entrepreneurial education*** to SME performance. The author selected financial performance and employment growth as key indicators for firm performance. The findings revealed that the impact of ***entrepreneurial education*** on firm performance was not significant. Nevertheless, none of the aspects discussed above have been found in the literature reviewed on SA SMEs. Hence, future research on SA SMEs should consider focusing on support programmes and edu-finance for SMEs. The author suggested that the government should entrench entrepreneurial

culture through legislating entrepreneurial education at all levels of education, including SME support programmes. The following subsection discusses entrepreneurial literacy in SMEs.

- **Entrepreneurial literacy small and medium enterprises**

The reviewed literature revealed that the performance of SMEs was influenced by ***entrepreneurial literacy (***Sariwulan, et al., 2020), such as ***technological literacy*** (Jati, et al., 2021), ***digital literacy*** (Ranatunga, et al., 2020; Çallı, et al., 2022; Zahoor, et al., 2023), ***information literacy competencies*** (Simić, et al., 2020) and ***e-literacy*** (Omiunu, 2019). Moreover, ***financial literacy*** was found in Sri Lanka (Ye & Kulathunga, 2019), China (Ali & Li, 2021), the United Arab Emirate (UAE) (Ali & Li, 2021) India (Singla & Mallik, 2021; Anshika & Mallik, 2021), Indonesia (Hatammimi & Krisnawati, 2018; Satiti, 2021; Wahyono & Hutahayan, 2021; Dai, et al., 2021; Harianti, et al., 2021; Jati, et al., 2021; Wahyulina, et al., 2023), Ethiopia (Jemal, 2019), Kenya (Barno, et al., 2021), Uganda (Bongomin, et al., 2017), Ghana (Agyapong & Attram, 2019; Tuffour, et al., 2020; Tuffour, et al., 2022), Nigeria (Eniola & Entebang, 2017; Adegbuyi, et al., 2018; Attamah, 2019), Zimbabwe (Maziriri, et al., 2018; Mashizha, et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial literacy has the capability of upgrading the competencies of managers and employees. For instance, financial literacy contributes to the competency of SME owners or managers in effective business financial management. Technological, e-literacy, information, and digital literacy might play a role in equipping employees with the competency and skills to implement modern methods that lead to the achievement of modern production. The next subsection discusses entrepreneurial literacy in SA SMEs.

- **Entrepreneurial literacy as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In a research publication by Munyuki & Jonah (2022) explore the association between financial literacy and entrepreneurial success among young entrepreneurs within an economically disadvantaged community in Cape Town, South Africa. The mixed-method approach was adopted for the study. In-depth interviews were used in collecting the qualitative data while structured interviews using questionnaires were administered in collecting the quantitative data. The participants in the study were strictly young entrepreneurs. The study found that

entrepreneurs understood the concept of financial literacy, and this was corroborated by their financial literacy average score of 59.03, which is above the national financial literacy average score of 54.00. The study further revealed that a positive association exists between financial literacy and entrepreneurial success. Hence, high levels of financial literacy result in increased business success. The sample size of the study was relatively small, the reason for a mixed-method approach was to strengthen the research findings. The research also considered only one disadvantaged community in South Africa (Khayelitsha).

Nevertheless, entrepreneurial literacy, technological literacy, information literacy competencies, digital literacy, e-literacy were not found in the literature reviewed on SA SMEs. Hence, future research on SA SMEs should consider covering these literacy aspects and entrepreneurship training. Moreover, the section below discusses other entrepreneurial factors.

4.5.11 Other entrepreneurial factors enabling organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.10.

Besides the above discussion of entrepreneurial factors, this section enumerates other entrepreneurial aspects not mentioned in this study. Hence, the following subsections discuss those factors as found in other SMEs and SA SMEs.

- **Other entrepreneurial factors enabling the organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Other existing entrepreneurial factors found in the reviewed literature on SMEs included: e***ntrepreneurship*** (Yu, et al., 2018; Pahnke & Welter, 2019; Al-Shaer & Zaman, 2019; Pahnke & Welter, 2019; Zhang, et al., 2019; Bandung et al., 2019; Li-nan, et al., 2019; Yamta, et al., 2020), ***micro-entrepreneurship*** (Chatterjee, et al., 2018), ***entrepreneurship for productivity*** (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, 2018), ***entrepreneurial SMEs*** (Cenamor, et al., 2019), ***entrepreneurial governance*** (Adeniyi; et al., 2020), and

entrepreneurial ecosystem governance (Cunningham, et al., 2019). Other entrepreneurial factors found in literature focusing on SA SMEs are narrated below.

- **Other entrepreneurial factors enabling the achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The survey by Mtshali and Chinyamurindi (2021) addresses the challenge of the failure rate faced by small businesses and suggests constant pursuits and involvement promoting ***entrepreneurial capability*** expansion for competitive advantage support. ***Entrepreneurial action*** was required for proactive-innovativeness and autonomic and aggressive competitiveness of SA SMEs (Dele-Ijagbulu, et al., 2020). Wiklund and Shepherd's (2017) ***portfolio entrepreneurship*** enabled SME performance. Nevertheless, the next section discusses leadership in OP.

4.5.12 Leadership factors enabling organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.10.

This section discusses leadership factors permitting the attainment of OP in SMEs and SA SMEs. The reviewed literature revealed the existing leadership factors and leadership styles that enabled OP achievement in this industry as follows:

- **Leadership styles as enablers of organisational performance achievement of SMEs**

Business performance and success of SMEs was influenced by ***leadership style*** (Okyere, 2017; Mkheimer, 2018; Sandybayev, 2019; Akonkwa, et al., 2021; Mwakajila & Nyello, 2021; Alifah & Sukmawati, 2021; Al Marshoudi, et al., 2023; Tay & Aigbogun, 2024) which included ***leadership performance*** (Onyema, et al., 2023), ***entrepreneurial leadership*** (Bagheri, 2017; Leitch & Volery, 2017; Palalic, 2017; Sklaveniti, 2017; Al Mamun, Ibrahim, et al., 2018; Nor-Aishah, et al., 2020; Sawaean & Ali, 2020), ***distributed or shared leadership*** (Sweeney, et al. 2019; Soni, et al., 2023), ***relational leadership*** (Almaloy, 2021), ***democratic leadership*** (Dyczkowska & Dyczkowski, 2018a; Dyczkowska & Dyczkowski, 2018b; Jony, et al., 2019; Fakhri, et al., 2021). Adopting various leadership styles might help SME owners or managers

to improve the business performance at different levels. Moreover, other leadership styles are listed below.

Other leadership styles enabling OP achievement of SMEs include ***e-leadership*** (Li, et al., 2017; Belitski & Liversage, 2019), ***ambidextrous leadership*** (Tuan-Luu, 2017; Oluwafemi, et al., 2020; Atiku & Randa, 2021; Atiku & Randa, 2021; Yang, et al., 2023; Turnalar-Çetinkaya, 2023), ***digital leadership*** (Eberl & Drews, 2021; Benitez, et al., 2022; Tigre, et al., 2023; Shin, et al., 2023), ***key leadership determinants*** (Suriyankietkaew, 2023), ***sustainable leadership*** (Suriyankietkaew, 2019b; Iqbal, et al., 2020), ***ethical leadership*** Ullah, et al., 2022; Şengüllendi, et al., 2023), ***innovation or innovative leadership*** (Kremer, et al., 2019), and ***strategic leadership*** (Kanyangale, 2017) which shaped ***strategic leaders*** (Simsek, et al., 2018).

In addition to the above, ***transactional leadership*** was another leadership style that supported SMEs' performance for success (Thahira, et al., 2020; Feranita, et al., 2020), and parallel, ***transformative leadership*** (Zhu, et al., 2022; Schiuma, et al., 2024) and ***transformational leadership*** supported the performance of many SMEs (Aketch, et al,, 2017; Abiodun & Ilesanmi, 2019; Afriyie, et al., 2019; Manzoor, Wei, et al., 2019; Boukamcha, 2019; Azim, et al., 2019; Feranita, et al., 2020; Feranita, et al., 2020; Iqbal, et al., 2021; Purwanto, 2022; Dahleez & Abdelmuniem Abdelfattah, 2022). This might indicate that given the multiplicity of the existing leadership styles, SME owners or managers should choose an appropriate style to facilitate the achievement of all dimensions of their company's performance. The next section discusses leadership factors in SA SMEs.

- **Leadership styles as enablers of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

A survey of 275 sampled small business owners by Maziti, et al. (2018) examined determinants influencing rapid change in South African small business performance. The findings demonstrated the link between ***strategic leadership*** with innovation performance and competitive advantage. Moreover, innovation performance was connected to competitive advantage quests. These results call for management practices using techniques of prediction and preparation for contemporary society and competitive intelligence. The connection between ***ethical leadership*** and business performance was acknowledged (Fatoki, 2020a). To emphasise, Fatoki (2020b) identified the link between ***ethical leadership*** and the financial

performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector. Similarly, Mitonga-Monga, et al. (2019) suggested that ***ethical leadership*** through the emergence of work ethics, culture increases workers' satisfaction and performance.

By drawing on the resource-based view (RBV), Mamabolo, et al. (2019) investigated the inputs of ***transformational leadership*** to SME performance through a cross-sectional quantitative research approach and the collection of data from 158 South African SMEs in sub-Saharan Africa. They found that transformational leadership contributed to SME performance and recommended using transformational leadership styles by entrepreneurs for the orientation and stimulation of SME entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, according to Afriyie, et al. (2019), individual development and employees' creative thinking acceleration are provided by leaders with a ***transformative style,*** which in turn leads to firm performance enhancement. Therefore, the use of transformational leadership would improve SA SME performance in general and particularly its profitability, productivity, market share and growth.

In the context of SA, it has been shown that SME performance was achieved by ***innovative leadership*** (Ngibe & Lekhanya, 2019, 2020). Mhlongo and Daya (2023) suggested the adoption of ***entrepreneurial leadership*** by entrepreneurs for their competency enhancement, and the competitive and sustainable growth of their companies. To emphasise, businesses' competitiveness and sustainable growth of the Gauteng province's SMMEs were improved through competent ***entrepreneurial leadership*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). The subsequent subsections discuss leadership factors enabling the achievement of OP in SMEs and SA SMEs.

- **Other leadership aspects as enablers of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

The findings of this study revealed that numerous recent literature publications acknowledged the influence of leadership on SMEs, for instance Asad, et al. (2017), Paudel (2019); Dabić, et al. (2021), Alifah and Sukmawati (2021) and Hossin, et al. (2023) demonstrated the important role played by leadership in SMEs' performance in various countries, such as Pakistan (Khaliq, et al., 2021), Malaysia (Rehman, et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2021), Jordan (Mkheimer, 2018), Ghana (Abdullahi, et al., 2020), Tanzania (Mwakajila & Nyello, 2021), Kenya (Chege & Gakobu, 2017), Democratic Republic of Congo (Akonkwa, et al., 2022) and so many others in terms of continual inputs to the industries' change and growth (Madanchian & Taherdoost,

2017), competitive advantage gain (Jermsittiparsert, 2020), decision-making (Khaliq et al., 2021), and so on. ***Leadership commitment*** can help SMEs to endure throughout this crisis (Islam, et al., 2021). Other leadership aspects leading to OP success of SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Other leadership aspects as enablers of organisational performance achievement of SMEs South African small and medium enterprises**

Similarly, effective leadership was found to be a need for starting up a SME and running businesses by South African entrepreneurs (Kerrin et al., 2017a). In the same way, leadership commitment was required to help SMEs endure the crisis in Malaysia (Islam, et al., 2021). The improvement of sustainable growth and the competitive growth of SMEs requires the enhancement of ***leadership development*** in management (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). Conversely to leadership, the next section concentrates on modernism and SME performance.

4.5.13 Modernity as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.11.

The current section discusses modernism factors enabling OP achievement of SA and SMEs operating in SA, which encompass technology, internet, digitalisation, and social media, and are debated in the subsection below.

- **Technology**

In many reviewed publications, ***technologies*** were revealed to be the modernism factor that facilitated the achievement of OP in SMEs (Eggers, et al., 2017; Bolaji & Nkiruka, 2017; Al-Lami, et al., 2019; Akpan, et al., 2020; Afolayan & Charles de la Harpe, 2020; Dutot, et al., 2021; Hasani, et al., 2023; Tay & Aigbogun, 2024). The performance of SMEs was achieved through ***technological change*** (Bolaji & Nkiruka, 2017), ***technology adoption*** (Afolayan & De la Harpe, 2020; Mishrif & Khan, 2023), and likewise ***technology adoption capabilities*** (Martínez-Román & Romero, 2017), as well as ***technological innovation*** (Aloini, et al., 2017).

Thus, in general, technologies should be counted amongst the organisational resources of SMEs.

Various forms of technologies have been used to achieve SMEs performance, such as ***cutting-edge technologies*** (Daferighe, et al., 2019; Akpan, Soopramanien & Kwak. 2020), ***state-of-the-art technologies*** (Akpan, et al., 2020; Grassi & Toschi, 2021; Shetty & Panda, 2021), ***cloud computing technology***(Attaran & Woods, 2018; Gupta, et al., 2018; Attaran & Woods, 2019; Ferri, et al., 2019; Dincă, et al., 2019; Neicu, et al., 2020; Jayeola et al. 2022), ***big data analytics*** adoption (Rawashdeh & Al-namlah, 2017; Ferraris, et al., 2019; Dong & Yang, 2020.; Maroufkhani, et al., 2020; Bertello, et al., 2021; Mangla, et al., 2021; Lutfi, et al., 2022; Maroufkhani, et al, 2023), as well as ***big data analytics management*** (Shamim, et al., 2019). These technologies were not found in the reviewed SME literature related to the SA context. This should be considered by potential future researchers.

In addition to the above, other technologies enabling the OP in SMEs included ***Information Technology (IT)*** (Zhang & Hartley, 2018; Rehman, et al., 2020; Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2021; Dutot, et al., 2021; Thottoli & Ahmed, 2022), more specifically its adoption (Nair, et al., 2019), capabilities (Neirotti & Raguseo, 2017), systems (Zhang & Hartley, 2018), innovation (Chege & Wang, 2019), and security (Ključnikov, et al., 2019). IT was suggested as a way to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in MSMEs in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021).

Information Communication and Technology (ICT) (Giotopoulos, et al., 2017; Paul, 2018; Krauss, et al., 2018; Jaganathan, et al., 2018; Santoro, et al., 2019; Makiwa & Steyn, 2019; Tehseen, et al., 2019; Qosasi, et al., 2019), and ***Industry 4.0 or fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies*** (Trotta & Garengo, 2019; Somohano-Rodríguez, et al., 2020; Agostini & Nosella, 2020; Alhumaidan, & Ahmad, 2021; Bettiol, et al., 2021; Müller, et al., 2021; Shi & Iqbal, 2021; Grooss, et al., 2022; Estensoro, et al., 2022; Naeem & Garengo, 2022; Karuppiah, et al., 2023), as well as ***blockchain technology*** (Clohessy & Acton, 2019; Nuryyev, et al., 2020; Galati, et al., 2021; Varriale, et al., 2021; Erol, et al. 2021 ; Sciarelli, et al., 2022 ; Asante-Boakye, et al., 2023). Literature revealed the application of IT and Industry 4.0 technologies for the OP of SA SMEs; however, no study that was reviewed stated the use of ICT and blockchain technology as OP enablers, which, therefore, requires the attention of academics and practitioners for forthcoming enquiries. The following subsection discusses technology as an enabler of SA SMEs.

- **Technology as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Technology should boost SMEs' innovation and competitiveness in the BRICS countries (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021). The improvement of innovation and competitiveness of SMEs in the BRICS countries requires investment in ***new technology*** (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021). In the same way, Pooe and Mahlangu's (2017) findings suggested that technology be positioned at the core of SME strategies in SA.

IT alignment enabled Nigerian and SA SMEs to resist rapid disturbance from a more unpredictable business environment (Ajibade & Mutula, 2021). In the same way, by adopting a qualitative research methodology, Mathu (2019) investigated the role of ***IT applications*** in SA food, and general trading SMEs operating in the Gauteng Province. The author interviewed their owners and managers. Supplier-customer information-sharing and supply chain integration, interaction, and collaboration were found to be improved by IT applications. In other words, IT can be seen as an enabler of market performance, given that customers are amongst the components of market performance dimensions.

Ajibade and Mutula (2019) supposed that business agility and productivity in SA SMEs could be improved by using IT. Knowing that only two dimensions would not be enough, thus, for successful SME performance, it is important to identify the role or impact of IT on financial and growth performances. Analogous to this, business process management in SA SMEs was mostly hindered by both business employees' skills development and IT staff expertise on business (Ajibade & Mutula, 2019). Furthermore, Govuzela and Mafini's (2019) findings suggested the effectiveness and efficiency of upgrading SA SME ***technology capabilities*** to improve both agility and overall OP. However, investment in technology is costly for SA SMEs (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017).

Besides the above, ***ICT*** was also helpful in reaching SA SMEs. As an illustration, the quality and accuracy of the relevant information improved through the use of ICT tools in SA SMEs (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017). In the same way, based on SMEs' COVID-19 supply chain (SC) resilience, Omoruyi and Makaleng's (2022) investigation revealed that the effective integration

and implementation of ***strategic communication systems*** led to SMEs' success during the COVID-19 era. The next subsection focuses on the internet and OP of SMEs.

- **Internet as an enabler of organisational performance success of small and medium enterprises**

The literature reviewed in this study revealed that many SMEs use internet techniques to achieve their performance. For instance, Rahayu1 (2017), Sedighi and Sirang (2018), Shemi and Procter (2018), Sanchez-Torres and Juarez-Acosta (2019), Ibrahim, et al. (2019), Hassen, et al. (2021), Tolstoy, et al. (2021) and Yang, et al. (2022) used ***e-commerce*** and ***international e-commerce*** (Tolstoy, et al., 2021). ***E-commerce*** implementors were concerned more about the supply chain organisation (Dethine, et al., 2020). This might show that e-commerce was directly linked to the OPP, while ***e-business*** was adopted by Bi, et al. (2017), Abdullah, et al. (2018) and Depaoli and Za (2019). To emphasise, ***e-business*** facilitators impacted the entire company (Dethine et al., 2020). Besides this, ***e-business innovation*** (Adzroe & Ingirige, 2017), ***e-business technologies*** (Neykova & Miltchev, 2019), ***e-business strategy*** (Wynn & Olayinka, 2021; Naab, et al. 2021).

The internet might be considered the core of business performance achievement. At the MP level, managers, shareholders, suppliers, customers, and employees can perform and be reached through the internet. Purchase and trade are made using the internet. At the OPP level, nowadays it might be difficult to implement effective production methods, systems, processes and strategies without using the internet. At the FP level, companies' obligations are paid through the use of the internet. The internet has increased the profitability of many SMEs given that expenses related to transport have been cut. At the GP level, the internet has made product acceptance by the community, the learning process, the sales growth and the company effectiveness easy.

In addition to the above, internet factors include ***e-logistics*** (Al Naim & Bhatti, 2022). Moreover, OP of SMEs was achieved through ***e-marketing*** (Erum, et al., 2017; Qashou & Arab, 2018; Al Adwan, et al., 2019; Jamil, 2020; Jamil, et al., 2020; Baporikar & Fotolela, 2021; Alrousan, et al., 2021; Etim, et al., 2021; Mulyana & Mohammad. 2022; Rahman, et al., 2022; AL-Zu'bi1, 2023). ***e-Marketing*** facilitators were related to communications and customer relations (Dethine et al., 2020). The helpful use of ***e-procurement*** was equally

perceived (Hassan, et al., 2017; Daoud & Ibrahim, 2020; Marei, et al., 2021; Naeem, et al., 2021; Al Naim & Bhatti, 2022). The next subsection discusses the internet in the achievement of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Internet as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA, Mafini, et al. (2020) surveyed 283 owners and managers of SMEs in Gauteng. Their findings disclosed that the implementation of ***e-procurement***, especially e-design and e-negotiation had a substantial and positive influence on supply chain integration. Chapter 2 of this study, it was mentioned that the supply chain was one of the OPP components. Thus, Mafini et al.'s (2020) findings might imply that the OPP dimension of Gauteng-investigated SMEs was influenced by ***e-procurement*** components, namely e-design and e-negotiation. It might be necessary to find out the effects of those internet practices on the financial, market and growth performance of SA SMEs.

The findings of the quantitative study of Madzimure (2020) in SMEs operating in the Sedibeng region of the Gauteng province recommended the effective implementation of ***e-negotiation*** and design by the companies' managers and owners to increase their suppliers' integration, supply chain cost reduction and performance upgrading. Mqutheni and Pillay's (2021) study suggested that approaches for the implementation of growth strategies in SA SMEs would be guided by the successful implementation of the Wireless Open Access Network policy. However, the implementation of integrated schemes and supply chain processes with their suppliers, customers, logistics services and banks is a requirement for SMEs (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017).

Besides ***e-procurement,*** none of the internet techniques listed here were found in SA SMEs. Therefore, these aspects should be covered in future research. Nevertheless, ***e-design and e-negotiation*** were found in SA SMEs, although they have not been mentioned in other SMEs. Nevertheless, in the section below, the findings of digitalisation of SMEs' performance are presented.

- **Digitalisation as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Digitalisation was found to be amongst modernity factors enabling the achievement of OP of SMEs (Sariwulan, et al., 2020), in garment clusters in the Bulak tourism industry Depok, ***internationalisation capability*** (Dethine, et al., 2020) ***digital transformation*** (Dethine, et al., 2020), ***digital facilitators*** (Dethine, et al., 2020). In addition, some findings revealed that ***digitalisation*** and firms' boundaries affect BMI in SMEs in Italian SMEs (Garzella, et al., 2020), ***access and management of financial resources*** can help SMEs to endure throughout the crisis (Islam, et al., 2021), ***exploration-exploitation of opportunities*** can help SMEs to endure throughout the crisis (Islam, et al., 2021), ***efficient negotiations*** can help SMEs to endure throughout the crisis (Islam, et al., 2021), ***digital adoption*** can help SMEs to endure throughout the crisis (Islam, et al., 2021).

Aspects of digitalisation that influence SME performance include ***digital technologies*** (Molinillo & Japutra, 2017; Astuti, et al., 2020; Vrontis, et al., 2022; Urbano, et al., 2024), ***digital information*** (Molinillo & Japutra, 2017), ***digital platform*** (Cenamora, et al., 2019), ***digital wave*** (Ballestar, et al., 2020), ***digital development*** (Depaoli, et al., 2020), ***digital business*** (Scuotto, et al., 2017), ***digital business management*** (Apriani, et al., 2024), ***digital transformation*** (Scuotto, et al., 2021; Chatterjee, et al., 2022; Lutfi, et al., 2022), and ***digital media*** (Nuseir, 2018; Camilleri, 2019). Furthermore, digital adoption was suggested as a help for SMEs undergoing a crisis in Malaysia (Islam et al., 2021). In the same way, digitalisation was found as an OP enabler as discussed below.

- **Digitalisation as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

To emphasise the above discussions, ***digitalisation*** should improve SMEs' innovation and competitiveness in the BRICS countries (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021). The assorted quantitative and qualitative studies on SMEs operating in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province revealed that ***digital technology*** was not used for business purposes, but rather for private communication and social friendship (Lekhanya, 2018). Nonetheless, none of these aspects were found in the literature on SA SMEs. Hence, there is a need to investigate the role

and impact of digital technologies, information, platforms, waves, development, business, business management, transformation, and media on the performance of SMEs operating in SA. Furthermore, social media in SMEs is discussed below.

- **Social media as an enabler of organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Social media has played a positive and significant role in the performance of SMEs (Mutoko & Kapunda, 2017; Bocconcelli, et al., 2017; Hitchen, et al., 2017; Guha, et al., 2018; Odoom & Mensah, 2019; Sariwulan, et al., 2020; Fang, et al., 2022; Hendri, et al., 2024) which has been demonstrated through ***social media engagement*** (Rozak, et al., 2021), ***social media adoption*** (Bakri, 2017; AlSharji, et al., 2018; Ahmad, et al., 2019; Cheng & Shiu, 2019; Qalati, et al., 2020; Effendi, et al., 2020; Qalati, et al., 2021; Trawnih, et al. 2021), ***social media use*** (Cheng & Shiu, 2019), ***social media marketing*** (Abbas, et al, 2019; Eid & Agag, 2020; Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Chatterjee, et al., 2021; Patma, et al., 2021; Syaifullah, et al., 2021; Samat, et al., 2024), ***social media tools*** (Kumar & Ayedee, 2018; Papa, et al., 2018), and s***ocial media platforms*** (Omotosho, 2020), such as ***Facebook and WhatsApp groups*** (Klonaridis & Heleneze-Tianè Lues, 2023). Nowadays, social media could be considered the most advantageous virtual marketplace for SMEs, given their limited resources to afford and realise great spots on television (TV). Likewise, social media has boosted the performance of SA SMEs.

- **Social media as an enabler of organisational performance achievement of small and medium enterprises in South African**

Social media was found to be a significant influential factor for SMEs (Rambe, 2017; Rambe, et al., 2019; Maphathe, 2019; Urban & Maphathe, 2021). Rambe (2017) investigated the use of ***social media technologies*** and their impact on market share extension and business operations competitiveness of tourism SMMEs functioning in the Free State province. It was found that ***social media marketing*** was mainly used for online marketing and promotion of products/services, attracting existing customers, and occasionally, for social media incorporation into marketing and competitive strategies.

Rambe, et al. (2019) explored social media utilisation in tourism SMMEs for the extension of business networks and competitiveness improvement. They surveyed hospitality SMMEs. Social media technologies were found to be used by most tourism SMMEs for customer retention, customer feedback, market dominance assertion, and maintenance of interaction between co-workers and shared information. Similarly, to Rambe (2017), the positivism method adopted by Maphathe (2019) demonstrated that ***social media business tools*** were used for customer acquisition and customer-base augmentation.

Moreover, there was a positive and significant link between social media marketing SMMEs' competitiveness (Rambe, 2017), and in a similar manner, ***social media business networking*** was meaningfully and constructively related to competitiveness (Rambe et al., 2019). Indeed, competitiveness enhancement requires ***social media*** incorporation into businesses' formal internal and external information strategy (Rambe et al., 2019).

Urban and Maphathe (2021) examined the contribution of ***social media platforms***, namely Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to the customer engagement upsurge. The results from the adopted quantitative approach revealed that all these platforms were significantly and positively connected to the intensification of customer engagement. The authors suggested making use of social media managers and owners for the upholding and development of network ties, widespread enabling resource identification, information gathering, reputation building and engagement with their customers. Furthermore, sustainable factors enabling SME performance are discussed in the following section.

4.5.14 Sustainable factors as enablers of organisational performance in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.11.

This section presents multiple sustainable factors found in the reviewed literature. Many sustainability-related-factors facilitate the attainment of OP in SMES. Indeed, these provided some evidence: ***sustainability*** impacted the competitiveness of SME manufacturing, construction, trade, and services operating in Mexico (Lopez-Torres, 2023). The company's performance was affected by business ***sustainability capabilities,*** such as monetary and eco-friendly competencies in the fashion and textile industries (Wong & Ngai, 2021). Corporate ***sustainability*** with its three dimensions, influenced the identity of the firm (Alcívar et al.,

2020). Other sustainable factors included ***sustainability innovation (***Mellett, et al., 2018; Arnold, 2018) and ***sustainability practices* (**Yadav, et al., 2018).

Besides the above, sustainability factors related to performance, such as ***sustainability performance*** (Anwar & Li, 2020), as found in Ghana (Owusu, et al., 2024), which was also labelled ***sustainable performance*** (Mondal, et al., 2024), and encompassed ***environmental sustainability performance*** (Tang & Tang, 2018; Tjahjadi, et al., 2023), ***financial performance*** in Indonesian SMEs were found to be meaningfully and positively connected (Nohong, et al., 2024), ***social performance*** (Kraus, et al., 2017), ***financial performance*** (Bartolacci & Caputo, 2020) and ***sustainable competitive advantage*** (Çağlıyan, et al., 2022) which included ***green competitive advantage*** (Setyaningrum, et al., 2023).

Talking above ***green in sustainability, green financial management*** and ***financial performance*** in Indonesian SMEs were found to be meaningfully and positively connected (Nohong, et al., 2024). Similarly, ***green financial management*** impacted the achievement of SME performance in Indonesia (Nohong, et al., 2024).

Sustainable factors also included ***environmental management processes*** (Tjahjadi et al., 2023). OP was found to be enabled by ***environmental sustainability (ES*** in several SMEs, for example, in the manufacturing firms in SME ES champions (Wiesner, et al., 2018) and Ghana (Amankwah-Amoah & Danso, 2019). From the point of view of top executives, entrepreneurs, and managers, the implementation of ***environmental initiatives*** in SMEs equates to greater firm performance in Ghana (Amankwah-Amoah & Syllias, 2020).

Social sustainability was suggested to boost a sense of community, safety, health, and place attachment, among other environmental objectives (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017), that could be done through ***corporate social responsibility (CSR)*** which was suggested to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in MSMEs in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021).

Iamandi, Constantin, et al. (2019) discovered that mapping the ***environmental and social governance (ESG***) eased the achievement of efficiency and competitiveness in European companies. Baba, et al.'s (2017) results demonstrate that during a ***turbulent environment,*** organisational learning predicts SMEs' innovativeness. The research expands the innovation literature by confirming the influence of organisational learning on SMEs' innovativeness in a developing nation, such as Nigeria. Moreover, this finding will help SME managers to improve

their firms' ability to innovate by considering a learning culture in their respective organisations.

Moreover, other sustainable factors enabling OP included ***sustainability orientation*** (Danso, et al., 2020; Alhumaidan & Ahmad, 2021; Ardito, et al., 2021), ***sustainability dynamism*** **(**Frank, et al., 2017; Augustie, & Saad, 2019; Mammassis & Kostopoulos, 2019; Ali, et al., 2020), ***organisational sustainability*** (Srisathan, et al., 2020). Furthermore, the subsequent section refers to sustainable related factors in SA SMEs.

- **Sustainable factors as enablers of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA SMEs, ***sustainability*** (Maziriri, 2020), like ***environmental sustainability*** influences were linked to the business performance of small restaurants (Chipunza & Mupani, 2019). In contrast, some aspects related to ***corporate responsibility*** enabled the achievement of SA SMEs. To illustrate, according to the quantitative study conducted by Krüger, et al. (2020) the SMEs in the Sedibeng District Municipal Area were particularly vulnerable to risk events and were not sufficiently aware of their industries' ***risks*** and various other risk types that led to risk awareness, and necessitated means to address those risks and to overcome their restrictions. SMEs in the Sedibeng District Municipal Area focused on business risk and operational risk (Krüger, et al., 2020). However, the discussions below deal with the enablers of sustainability.

4.6 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 1b: ENABLERS OF SUSTAINABILITY OF SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are related to Tables 4.8, 4.9, 4.10. and 4.11 of this chapter.

The discussion of this section links Research Objective 1 to respond to Research Question 1b which was formulated as follows: ***R*****Q1b)** *What are OP enablers and how do OP enablers facilitate the attainment of sustainability and OP of SMEs in South Africa?*

The section debates corporate, managerial, business factors, entrepreneurial, and leadership. modernity and sustainable factors enabling the achievement of sustainability in SMEs and SA SMEs. The following section concentrates on corporate factors.

4.6.1 Corporate factors enabling sustainability of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.8.

This section discusses corporate factors that make the achievement of sustainability possible. as answers to the research questions set in Chapter 1. The discussions on the gaps in the literature are also mentioned.

- **Corporate resources enabling small and medium enterprises' sustainability achievement**

According to Latan, et al. (2018), organisational resources led to the progress of environmental performance of SMEs in Indonesia. ***HR*** was among the main challenges of sustainability achievement in SMEs (Lee, 2019). Cardoni, et al. (2020) found that the economic sustainability of Italian SMEs was positively impacted by ***knowledge management***. The next section discusses corporate resources and SA SMEs' sustainability achievement.

- **Corporate resources enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Obtaining the ***right funds*** and managing the funds well, was the requirement for more sustainable small businesses in Durban (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). On the contrary, ***awareness*** enabled the sustainability achievement of SMEs in SA. To illustrate, Kimanzi (2019) adopted a quantitative research method to determine from the SA SME owners' and managers' perspective in the Pietermaritzburg area, the ***awareness levels*** of sustainability concepts, ***knowledge*** of applicable sustainability standards, familiarity with sustainability regulations, and their possible impact on their operations.

Rajaram (2017) examined the role and inputs of skills expansion for sustainability in SMEs. The author conducted face-to-face interviews with 15 SME owners in the manufacturing sector in Durban and East London, South Africa, and found that sustainability was influenced by ***skills*** growth. In the same way, by implementing quantitative methods, Msomi and Olarewaju (2021) investigated accounting skills and SMEs' sustainability in SA retail, manufacturing, and construction sectors. Msomi and Olarewaju 's (2021) findings acknowledged the existing connections between accounting skills and sustainable SMEs. Similarly, sustainability was meaningfully achieved with accounting skills. Similarly, ***skills acquisition*** was found to be a necessity for ensuring the correctness of corporate transaction recording, financial assistance requests from the banks or similar financial establishments, but the realisation of SA SMEs' sustainability (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). Furthermore, Pett, et al. (2024) sampled 392 SMEs from France, India, and the USA. They found that environmental and social performance were improved through ***knowledge transfer***. This indicates the importance of knowledge transfer in the achievement of OPP and MP.

Conversely to these findings, entrepreneurs' perceptions were found to be the factor influencing SA SMEs' sustainability (Asoba, & Patricia, 2021). This might indicate sustainability of SA SMEs was enabled by corporate resources. However, in the below subsection corporate behaviours enabling sustainability achievement in SMEs were identified. and SA SMEs' sustainability achievement.

- **Corporate behaviours enabling sustainability achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Corporate behaviours might be counted among sustainability enablers. For instance, ***dynamic capabilities*** influenced SMEs' sustainability in the health sector (Akkaya & Üstgörül, 2021). More evidence of corporate behaviours towards SMEs' sustainability were provided in the SA context sustainability.

- **Corporate behaviours enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Although in a study conducted in SA, Jacobs and Maritz (2020) mentioned the current strong ***ambidexterity dimensions*** and sustainable performance relationships, even though no study indicated the role or influence of organisational ambidexterity on OP of SA SMEs. Therefore, given the importance of ambidexterity in OP, it is necessary to conduct such a study in the SA context. Analogous to Jacobs and Maritz, by adopting a quantitative research approach and a cross-sectional survey method, Mankgele (2023) studied ***organisational ambidexterity*** and the sustainable performance relationships in SA SMEs using environmental, financial, and social indicators of sustainable performance measurement. The authors discovered that organisational ambidexterity and SMEs' environmental, financial, and social performance were significantly and positively connected.

Moreover, the findings called for training and education of SME owners on organisational ambidexterity and sustainable performance through seminars organised by small businesses agency supporters. In the same way, continual self-education of business owners and staff regarding organisational ambidexterity. However, the findings by Govuzela and Mafini (2019) acknowledged the importance of ***organisational agility*** in building the SA SMEs' ability to respond and acclimatise to the ecological changes. The conclusion of the study recommended agile abilities modification and development for the optimisation of companies' performance in SA SMEs. Corporate practice-related discussions are provided below.

- **Corporate practices as enablers of sustainability in small and medium enterprises**

According to Mellett, et al. (2018), ***network*** facilitated green innovation capability development in micro-firms in Ireland. In the same way, sustainability initiatives undertaken in the companies were influenced by ***network*** exchange agents of the organisational networking (Saunders, et al., 2019), and equally, the chance for sustainability accomplishment beyond 2030 was suggested to be improved by ***robust partnerships*** (Saxena, et al., 2021). This indicates that network might be considered as an enabler of the sustainability achievement of SMEs.

Zhang, et al. (2022) asserted that ***innovation*** could indirectly improve SME profitability through social performance. In the same way, social and environmental performances were achieved through innovation (Zhang, et al., 2022). Supply chain management influenced MSMEs' sustainability in Indonesia (Nugroho, et al., 2024). Islam, et al. (2021) discovered that innovation influenced SMEs' sustainability in Nigeria. Crifo, et al. (2019) ***governance structure*** influenced corporate sustainability in France. Conversely to the above discussions, strategic attention to ***transformative learning*** for education and organisational learning was suggested to enhance the chance of sustainability achievement beyond 2030 (Saxena, et al., 2021). Similarly, corporate practices and SA SME sustainability are discussed in the following subsection.

- **Corporate practices enabling the sustainability achievement of SMEs in small and medium enterprises in South Africa**

Masocha and Fatoki's (2018) findings suggest that they ensure sustainable development is spread amongst SA SMEs, essentially ensured by the sustenance of professional affiliations and ***networking*** of SMEs regarding problems associated with sustainable development. On the contrary, Matekenya & Moyo (2022) asserted that ***innovation*** is regarded as a crucial determinant of growth and development in South Africa, and SMMEs have been earmarked as instruments for the achievement of the socio-economic goals and innovation as set out in the National Development Plan. Proper ***education and training*** were suggested to boost SME's sustainability in SA (Ayandibu et al., 2019). This may equip the organisation with skilled managers and employees.

Rajaram (2017) conducted a qualitative study to examine the role and inputs of training and skills expansion for sustainability in SMEs operating in East London and Durban in South Africa, and found that sustainability was influenced by ***training***. Similarly, the outcomes of Masocha and Fatoki's (2018) research recommended that the spread of sustainable expansion of operative SMEs in SA should be guaranteed by supportive ***training*** regarding sustainable development questions. Msomi and Olarewaju's (2021) findings suggest that ***accounting training*** by SME owners will achieve sustainability in these SA companies. Contrary to these mentioned findings, sustainability-related legislations were well-known by SA SME managers

and owners in the Pietermaritzburg area (Kimanzi, 2019). Nevertheless, managerial factors enabling sustainability achievement are the focus of the next section.

4.6.2 Managerial factors enabling sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.9.

This section discusses managerial factors that facilitate the realisation of sustainability of SMEs. These factors encompassed ***top management commitment***, ***management accounting practices, strategy management accounting practices*** and ***environmental management accounting use.***

The literature reviewed in this study showed some managerial factors supported the accomplishment of sustainability in SMEs. To illustrate, the sustainability risk management of SMEs in Sri Lanka was affected by ***top management commitment*** and stakeholder pressure, similarly, sustainability core values were affected (Wijethilake & Lama, 2019). A study conducted in Indonesian SMEs by Latan et al. (2018) demonstrated the capability of top management commitment to reach improved environmental performance. SME ecological performance could be enhanced by corporate environmental strategy (Latan et al., 2018). Likewise, ***strategies*** influenced local cultural desires of MSEs performance in Nepal (Rai et al., 2020).

Management accounting practices improved business sustainability for SMEs operating on the east coast of Malaysia (Azudin & Mansor, 2018). Moreover, Osim, et al. (2020) suggested the use of ***MAC practices*** for the profitability guarantee and sustainability of businesses. Latan et al. (2018) acknowledged the capability of ***environmental management accounting use*** in advancing the eco-friendly performance in Indonesia. Likewise, in South Jakarta, material loss reduction was observed and negative impact minimisation to the environment due to the use of environmental management accounting (Syarif & Novita, 2019). The use of environmental management accounting helps managers to make decisions regarding the improvement of the business environment that is negatively affected activities related to the production. This will have a positive influence on OPP achievement.

In the same way, the next subsection discusses the findings of managerial factors and sustainability success in SMEs.

- **Managerial factors enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In South Africa, in the North West province. an effective management approach was needed for the enhancement of the success of SMEs (Saah & Musvoto, 2020). Environmental ***management accounting*** practices were found to be the drivers of sustainable development adoption (Van Der Poll, 2022). Hamann et al. (2017) suggested that ***managers' environmental responsibility*** should play a better role in SME engagement to pro-environmental behaviours than competitiveness and legitimacy-seeking in SA.

Fatoki (2020) suggested that sustainable performance improvement necessitated the development of ***strategies*** by small business owners in SA. In the same way, the quantitative study conducted by Chinyamurindi & Gwena (2018) found the necessity of ***strategies*** development for sustainability improvement in SA SMEs. Saah and Musvoto (2020) suggested that for SMEs to become sustainable, ***strategic management*** was a requirement for the ***strategy*** implementation towards effective management measures leading to SME management. Planning was suggested for sustainable small businesses in Durban (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). The findings by Msomi et al. (2019) suggested that sustainability improvement required the use of appropriate ***MAC practices.***

Asoba and Patricia (2021) investigated entrepreneurs' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of ***human capital management's*** influence on entrepreneurial ventures' sustainability and entrepreneurial venture growth of the SME restaurant sector in Cape Town. They conducted 15 interviews that were thematically analysed. They found that human resources were fundamental for entrepreneurial venture growth due to certain social, psychological, philosophical, ideological attributes and exploitable entrepreneurial talents, possessed by people as the drivers of growth and resources value that other resources do not possess. The findings suggested merging human resource management with growth. To this end, HRM should work towards environmental, social, economic, and cultural growth for sustainable

SME restaurants, while considering financial, operational and market factors for the success of those SME performance. Nevertheless, business factors enabled sustainability achievement as discussed in the following section.

4.6.3 Business factors enabling sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.10.

Sustainability achievement in SMEs was determined by ***business environment*** (Mayanja & Perks, 2017) in Uganda (Struwig, et al., 2019), ***incubation of sustainable growth performance*** of SMEs in Indonesia (Hadi, 2023), and ***green business practices*** to SME sustainability (Aghelie, 2017). In the same way, business factors allowing the sustainability success of SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Business factors enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA SME's performance was driven by business factors including ***business environment*** (Otto, et al., 2023), ***business incubation*** effects on economic growth (Rens, et al., 2021), ***incubators'*** roles and influence on the environment (Wu, et al., 2020). In other words, the valuable role all organisations face with sustainability challenges might turn the company into a sustainable business environment. Whereas, in Gauteng. weak ***business planning*** retarded much-needed economic growth (Marecha, 2020). However, entrepreneurial factors were also among the enablers of the sustainability of SMEs as discussed in the following section.

4.6.4 Entrepreneurial factors enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.10.

This section discusses entrepreneurial factors leading to the achievement of sustainability of SMEs as follows: ***entrepreneurial orientation*** facilitated the achievement of sustainability (Khan, et al., 2019), for instance, it influenced environmental sustainability (Amankwah-

Amoah & Danso, 2019). ***Entrepreneurship*** supported the implementation of the circular economy (Suchek, et al., 2022), and a ***market-oriented business model*** was designed and used for CSR implementation (Sundström, et al., 2020). However, ***stakeholder orientation*** enabled environmental proactivity (Brulhart, et al., 2019). In the same way, SMEs' ecological strengths in China were improved by ***stakeholder orientation*** (Tang & Tang, 2018). However, ***entrepreneurial education*** enabled SMEs' sustainability through ***financial literacy*** (Ye & Kulathunga, 2019; Winarsih, et al., 2020). Yet, business performance was influenced by ***entrepreneurship training*** (Malipula, 2023). The current discussion demonstrates that various sustainability aspects can be achieved by multiple entrepreneurial factors. Furthermore, the next section discusses what was found in SA SME literature.

- **Entrepreneurial factors enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

The ***hostile environment*** of SA's small business sector needed ***entrepreneurial action*** (Dele-Ijagbulu et al., 2020). Through a survey, Fatoki (2018) suggested ways to enhance the ***resilience*** of small business owners to ensure the sustainability of SMEs in SA. Urban's (2019) findings suggested high levels of ***entrepreneurial orientation*** for the required emerging market environments of SMEs in SA. Contrary to this discussion, leadership factors supporting the success of SME sustainability are provided in the subsequent section. ***Entrepreneurial particularities*** influenced the performance sustainability of SMEs in SA (Orlu, et al., 2018). Besides entrepreneurial factors, leadership and SME sustainability success are discussed in the following section.

4.6.5 Leadership factors enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.10.

This section discusses the contribution of leadership to the attainment of sustainability in organisations. The literature review conducted in this study revealed important roles that leadership might play in the achievement of sustainability in SMEs. To illustrate, leadership influenced sustainability in developing economies (Donkor & Dongmei, 2018). In India, for

instance, leadership reinforced the link between social media marketing usage and sustainable business development of SMEs (Chatterjee, et al., 2021).

In Vietnam, the adoption of the circular economy (CE) practices was enabled by leadership (Chowdhury, et al., 2022), and likewise, sustainable performance among the Vietnamese SMEs was improved through leadership (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Moreover, the findings by Saxena, et al. (2021) assumed that the probability of success and sustainability beyond 2030 would be increased by leadership. Pett, et al. (2024) sampled 392 SMEs from France, India, and the US. They found that ***leadership*** had a direct effect on financial performance. Similarly, to the actual debate, the subsection below discusses leadership factors that facilitate the attainment of sustainability in SA SMEs.

- **Leadership factors enabling sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA, Fatoki (2020) found an optimistic and noteworthy connection between ***ethical leadership*** and financial performance. This might indicate that ethical leadership can lead SMEs to high profitability which might allow the companies to save and invest more, and to improve the conditions of the current firm. Similarly, ethical leadership was linked to social performance. Many SMEs are involved in wrong practices. On the contrary, there was an inconsequential positive connection between ethical leadership and environmental performance.

In addition to the above, the attendance of training and seminars on ***ethical leadership*** would help small business owners in SA to promote and expand their sustainable performance (Fatoki, 2020). Nevertheless, there were not many literature publications mentioning the role or impact of leadership on the sustainability of SMEs in general and SA SMEs. This calls for the attention of academics and postgraduate students for future research. Besides leadership, modernity was the other factor leading to sustainability realisation in SMEs. This is discussed in the section below.

4.6.6 Modernity factors enabling sustainability achievement of in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.11.

This section discusses the findings of modernism and how it impacts sustainability achievement in SMEs. The reviewed literature revealed that the environment was influenced by ***technology*** (Lina & Suwarni, 2022). The sustainable performance of Tunisian SMEs was enabled by ***Industry 4.0.*** (Alhumaidan & Ahmad, 2021). This might indicate that sustainability dimensions and sustainability performance in SMEs can be achieved by modernism factors like technology.

Digitalisation included the ***integrated digital marketing*** that influenced the sustainability of MSMEs in Indonesia (Nugroho et al., 2024). Sustainability was absolutely and meaningfully influenced by ***digital technologies*** (Vrontis, et al., 2022). Similarly, ***digital transformation*** had a positive and significant influence on the ecosystem (Khurana, et al., 2022). However, the role of other modernity factors mentioned in this study should be considered in future research. Nevertheless, modernity factors' role in the achievement of SA SME sustainability is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Modernity factors enabling sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

This subsection briefly discusses how modernity factors enabled the success of sustainability in SA SMEs. Adequate ***technology*** was needed for the sustainability of small businesses in Durban (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). IT was integrated into the business and was found to be aligned with business sustainability improvement (Ajibade & Mutula 2019). ***Technology 4.0*** facilitated the sustainability of small businesses (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). However, not much was found about modernism and the sustainability of SA SMEs, which requires further investigation. Moreover, the next section addresses sustainable factors enabling the sustainability achievement of SMEs.

4.6.7 Sustainable factors enabling sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.11.

This section discusses the findings of sustainable factors enabling the achievement of sustainability in SMEs. The conditions of SMEs nearby communities were improved by the effectiveness of ***sustainability implementation*** (Hristov et al., 2022). For instance, the findings by Latan, et al. (2018) suggested that ***ecological uncertainty*** could influence the improvement of SME environmental performance in Indonesia. The ***environmental management process*** played a role in the achievement of environmental sustainability performance (Tjahjadi et al., 2023). In the same way, ***environmental management control systems*** played an important role in the achievement of sustainable performance and ecological sustainability (Rehman, et al., 2021).

Moreover, the adoption of ***green innovations*** influenced the sustainability of SMEs (Lutfi, et al., 2023). For instance, ***green management*** played a role in sustainability performance development (Raharjo, 2019). Similarly, a ***green environmental management system*** supported environmental performance (Lutfi, et al., 2023). Likewise, ***green management development*** influenced sustainability performance and led to sustainable enterprises in the cooking industry (Yudawisastra & Anwar, 2023). Moreover, ***green financial management and green operations practices*** were significantly and positively linked (Nohong, et al., 2024). These discussions clearly show that sustainability was mostly enabled by environmental factors. This requires further investigation on how social, economic, and cultural related factors could facilitate the sustainability success of SMEs. In addition, sustainable factors allowing the achievement of sustainability of SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Sustainable enablers of sustainability in South African small and medium enterprises**

The hostile environment of SA's small business sector needed ***risk-taking*** (Dele-Ijagbulu, et al., 2020). Of course, this might require the implementation of corporate environmental

responsibility practices. The next section deals with challenges faced by SMEs in the achievement of their OP.

4.7 DISCUSSIONS ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 2a: CHALLENGES OF ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are related to Tables 4.12., 4.13 and 4.14 of this chapter.

The discussions of this section are related to the Research Objective 2. These discussions concerned the answers to the following research question: ***Research Question R*Q2a:** *What are the challenges impeding the attainment of OP of SMEs in South Africa?*

The section debates corporate, managerial, business factors, entrepreneurial, and leadership, modernity and sustainable factors challenging the achievement of OP in SMEs and SA SMEs.

4.7.1 Corporate factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.12:

The section discusses corporate factors challenging OP achievement in SMEs which included corporate resources, behaviours, and practices. The following section focuses on corporate resources challenging OP achievement in SMEs

- **Corporate resources challenging organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

First, according to Woschke, et al. (2017); and De Massis, et al. (2018), the ***scarceness of resources and limited resources*** were the challenges of performance realisation in SMEs, likewise, ***vulnerable to crisis*** (Syed, 2019), and ***crisis scarcity of resources*** and ***capital*** (Syed, 2019). To demonstrate this, ***limited credit facilities*** were found in Chinese SMEs (Shi & Iqbal,

2021), likewise, the ***lack of access to credit*** in SMEs operating in Gambia (Faal, 2020). In other words, financial challenges were the major problem obstructing the success of SME performance.

Second, contrary to the above, the OP of SMEs was challenged by abstract resources like ***crisis scarcity of time*** (Syed, 2019), ***physical infrastructure*** which resulted in a shortage of premises in SMEs (Anderson, 2017), ***limited facilities and infrastructure*** affected the sustainable competitive advantage of MSMEs in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), ***restricted related-technological tools*** in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), ***unreliable electricity*** negatively affected SME growth (Anderson, 2017), ***inadequate access to raw materials*** in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), low-quality raw materials in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), availability ***of insufficient premises*** constrained most SMEs (Anderson, 2017), furthermore, ***crisis scarcity of employees*** affected business operations (Syed, 2019).

Thiry, ***HR*** was among the factors limiting SME performance (Horak, 2017; Farkas, et al., 2020; Hoon, et al., 2019), as an example, women entrepreneurs faced challenges by SMEs in Asian countries (Li, et al., 2020), while ***low innovative human capital*** limited Chinese SMEs (Shi & Iqbal, 2021), and ***social capital*** was a big challenge in Indonesia (Bekasi City) (Yani1, et al., 2020), and Zimbabwe (Munyanyi, et al. (2021). Given the importance of human capital in any organisation, such insufficiencies affect the OPP of SMEs of employees' performance and productivity. Similarly, the MP dimension might be touched in a harmful way regarding customer service delivery, interaction, communication and customer satisfaction. This might require the recruitment of employees regularly and the setting of an effective strategy for employee retention.

Fourth, other resource constraints in SME performance include ***limited access to business development services*** (Faal, 2020), ***lack of market access*** (Faal, 2020), ***inadequate managerial knowledge*** for instance, in SMEs in Gambia (Faal, 2020), and likewise ***inadequate managerial skills,*** like in SMEs located in Gambia (Faal, 2020). Further, ***managerial resources*** alone could not contribute to high performance achievement in SMEs in Nigeria (Ugheoke, 2021). In the same way, ***talent management*** in SMEs indicated major challenges in attracting and retaining talent (Festing, et al., 2017), similarly, ***new management talent*** (Whysall, et al., 2019) was also a serious problem, and in the same way, the ***lack of knowledge*** of production technology affected the achievement of a sustainable competitive advantage of MSMEs in Indonesia

(Jatmiko, et al., 2021). Notwithstanding these, according to Nikolić, et al. (2019), several factors contributed to the failure of SMEs, such as ***the level of recovery, business life cycle stage*** and the sector of a failed SME impact the ranking of the factors leading to SME failure. The following subsection discusses organisational capital challenging OP achievement of SA SMEs.

- **Corporate resources challenging OP achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

Organisational or ***corporate resources*** were the challenges of OP in SA SMEs. South African SMEs challenged ***corporate resources*** (Mamabolo, et al., 2017; Cameron & Hoque, 2017; Bushe, 2019), such as ***access to finance*** (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). Innovation in South African SMEs was not principally determined by financial resources (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). Similarly, according to Matekenya and Moyo's (2022) study, innovation was a challenge to smaller and low-growth companies given their inability to spend on R&D due to the lack of finance. Matekenya and Moyo (2022) found that SA SMEs' survival rate was low due to a deficiency of funds. Smaller enterprises with lesser sales growth need financial assistance to cover the large monetary expenditure required for R&D expenses (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022). SMMEs consistently suffer from lower performance levels and high levels of failure due to the lack of ***financial resources*** and/or finances (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023).

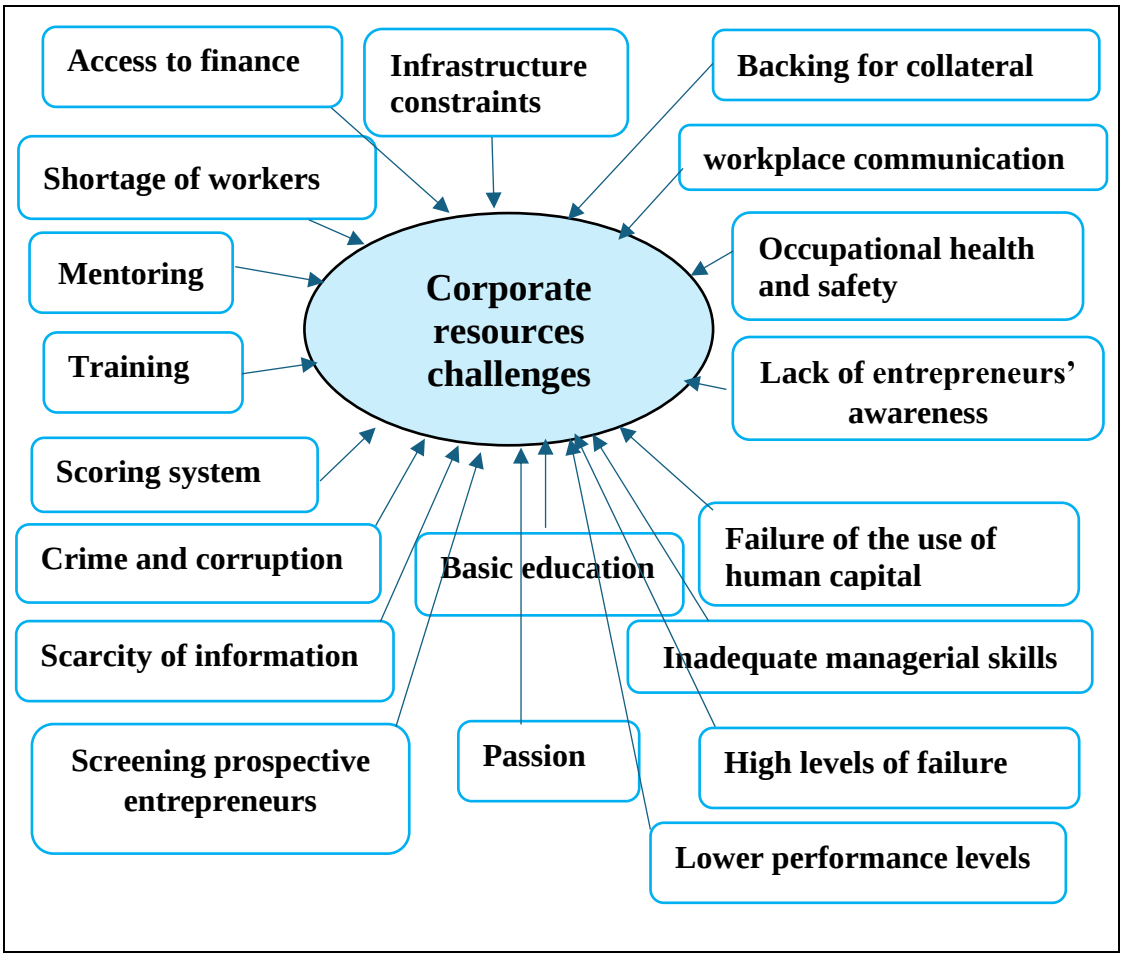
In a like manner, the qualitative study by Cameron & Hoque (2017) on SMEs in the Ethekwini Metro revealed that ***basic education, mentoring, passion, training, screening prospective entrepreneurs, the scoring system, and backing for collateral*** were the obstacles to ***finance accessibility***. Their financial specialists suggested the attendance of training courses on basic the mentions factors by entrepreneurs during the application of finance to financial institutions. This would lead to entrepreneurs' growth which in turn would surely contribute to the performance growth of the company.

Other challenges included ***human capital***. The findings on human capital investments conducted by Mamabolo, et al. (2017) revealed the ***failure of the use of human capital investments,*** which required extra entrepreneurship-specific investments. Thus, they suggested that entrepreneurs learn skills by being self-taught, and people skills in their social networks

are acquired skills from human capital investments. Other human-related capital included ***occupational health and safety*** (Mafundu & Mafini, 2019) and ***workplace communication*** (Mafundu & Mafini, 2019). The successful implementation of open innovation in SA SMEs is challenged by a ***shortage of workers*** (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023). South African SME innovation was not only determined by human resources (Venter & Hayidakis, 2021). SMMEs consistently suffer from ***lower performance levels*** and ***high levels of failure*** due to ***infrastructure constraints*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023).

Conversely, ***inadequate managerial skills*** challenged the successful adoption of open innovation in Pietermaritzburg' SMEs (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023). The ***scarcity of information*** was a factor challenging the successful implementation of open innovation in SMEs operating in KwaZulu-Natal (Hlatywayo & Williamson, 2023). Whereas the conclusions of Mogashoa & Selebi's (2021) investigations called for ***entrepreneurs' awareness*** regarding blind spots that can potentially hinder the growth of SA SMEs. However, SMMEs consistently suffer from lower performance levels and high levels of failure due to ***crime and corruption*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). In addition, the next subsection focuses on corporate behaviour challenges and the achievement of SME performance.

Figure 4.9: Corporate resources challenging the achievement of organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises



Author's own

- **Corporate behaviour challenging** organisational **performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Organisational capability was found to be the challenge of OP success in SMES. For instance, even the few premises available were well beyond the ***financial ability*** of most SMEs (Anderson, 2017). Similarly, ***pricing capability*** challenged Indian SMEs operating in the manufacturing and service sectors (Ranjan & Nayak, 2023).

- **Corporate behaviours challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

Talking about ***capabilities for market and customer knowledge***, a study by Mogashoa & Selebi (2021) demonstrated that small enterprises in SA suddenly lagged behind large and medium-sized enterprises. Through a conducted explorative empirical review, Bushe (2019) investigated the failure causes and impact of South African SMEs. As a result, ***environmental inauspiciousness, entrepreneur inability, and enterprise incompetence*** were the causes of SME failure. Moreover, ***unemployment, income and job loss, poverty, and social evils were*** the consequences of those imperfections found in SA SMEs.

Mogashoa & Selebi (2021) adopted a quantitative methodology to investigate ***innovation capacity*** degree and differences in South African consulting engineering businesses. Their findings revealed that although there was an average to high innovation capacity, however, large and medium-sized companies performed correspondingly, while small organisations lagged. SMEs' ***adaptive capacity*** was negatively linked to OPP (Masakale & Pooe, 2022).

Furawo and Scheepers (2018) recognised that the ***capability*** of Cape Town SMEs to innovate was challenged by a turbulent business environment. Insufficient and slow ***capability*** of integrating the IT infrastructure with the scope of IT architecture was found in Nigerian and SA SMEs (Ajibade & Mutula, 2021). On the contrary, the designed cross-sectional survey research by Masakale and Pooe (2022) disclosed a positive and significant relationship between ***dynamic capabilities*** and SME operational performance that led to the achievement of business success. In the same way, the relationship between personal ***entrepreneurial competencies*** and ***adaptive capacity*** was found to be challenging (Masakale & Pooe, 2022). Nevertheless, SMMEs consistently suffer from lower performance levels and high levels of failure due to the ***lack of training*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023), however, ***relationship commitment*** impacted less performance in SMEs in SA (Pfanelo, 2017), Furthermore, organisational practices challenges related to OP achievement of SMEs are discussed below.

❖ **Corporate practices challenging organisational performance achievement in small and medium enterprises**

Supply chain management was found to be the constraint to Tanzanian SMEs (Nkwabi, 2019). ***Internationalisation*** has been the challenge of SMEs (Sundström, et al., 2020). risk-taking of ***informal networks*** on the performance of selected small and medium enterprises in Nigeria (Lawal, et al., 2018). Contrary to this, ***corporate governance*** has been a challenge of OP in SMEs. To emphasise, challenges and risks of ***CG practice*** in SMEs (Spiers, 2017), ***challenges in CG*** and company performance in European countries (Kostyuk & Barros, 2018), practical issues and risks faced by ***new CG*** during the COVID-19 outbreak in Indian SMEs (Patel, et al., 2020), ***ethical dilemmas*** faced by employees in Zimbabwean retail companies in their daily tasks (Rambe & Ndofirepi, 2017), and incorporated ***legal entities*** in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021). ***Global crises*** affected the performance of SMEs, for instance, in Malaysian academia; banking, NGOs and SMEs (Islam, et al., 2021). ***Global crises*** constrained Canadian high-growth SMEs (Lim, et al., 2020; Cowling, et al., 2020; Craven, et al., 2020), and ineffective performance appraisal in SMEs from China (Shi & Iqbal, 2021). Furthermore, corporate practices challenging the realisation of performance in SMEs are discussed in the subsection below.

- **Corporate practices challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

The investigation of the determinants of supplier selection criteria by independent retailers in Soweto through a survey revealed that severe competitive pressure from large retailers was the challenge facing independent vendors as they were still purchasing products from wholesalers instead of buying directly from the manufacturers. The findings proposed product purchase, and healthier price negotiations through the joining of buying groups (Makhitha, 2017). Besides, this might also necessitate direct network building with manufacturers, which would ease the market performance of independent retailers in township and rural areas of Soweto.

The more SA SMEs' entrepreneurs were not involved in ***networking***, the lesser their businesses performed as the connection became undesirable (Mlotshwa & Msimango-Galawe, 2020). In their quantitative study conducted in Nigeria and SA, Ajibade and Mutula (2021) observed that

SMEs were negatively affected by the nonexistence of ***partnerships*** between ***IT*** and business units/departments lack of or inability of the ***IT*** and business department collaboration obstructed by the maximisation of their employees' potential and operational agility upsurge. ***Corporate governance*** was the other challenge in SA. In SA, the achievement of innovation in Cape Town SMEs was challenged by ***constraining legislation*** (Furawo & Scheepers, 2018). Good practises in organisations might become the priority for satisfactory performance attainment. Moreover, the next section discusses managerial challenges associated with the OP achievement of SMEs.

4.7.2 Managerial factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.13.

This section discusses the findings of the reviewed literature on managerial factors challenging OP achievement in SMEs. The reviewed literature demonstrated that OP achievement in SMEs faced several managerial challenges like ***lack of good financial administration*** affected the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage MSMEs in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), ***lack of good management systems*** affected the achievement of a sustainable competitive advantage for MSMEs in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), ***lack of integrated coordination*** between MSMEs' and stakeholders of the achievement of a sustainable competitive advantage South African in Indonesia (Jatmiko, et al., 2021), ***accounting challenges*** (Marques, et al., 2020), ***social and ethical issues of management accounting and control*** (Endrikat, et al, 2017), ***managerial practices*** (Hristov, et al., 2022), ***supply chain management constraints*** in Tanzania (Nkwabi, 2019), ***owner-managers 'perspectives'*** affected by SMEs in Namibia (Letsoalo & Rankhumise, 2023), and ***strategic planning*** limitations and deficiency in Botswana were the barriers of OP achievement of SMEs (Majama, & Magang, 2017). Similarly, to the present discussion, the next section addresses the managerial challenges associated with the attainment of OP in SA.

- **Managerial challenges of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

In the quantitative study conducted by Blose and Okeke-Uzodike (2020), ***human resource management systems*** were found to be the internal environment factor challenging the business growth in SA SMMEs' business environment, and suggested concentrated training and development programmes as a support to equipping human resources capability in tackling the challenges faced by these enterprises operating in the business environment of Msunduzi Municipality, ***strategic planning techniques*** in SMMEs operating in Johannesburg (Vukile, et al., 2022), ***quality management systems*** (Zondo. 2018) and ***supply chain*** (Loury-Okoumba & Mafini, 2021). Furthermore, most SMEs failed due to ***high business operating costs*** (Loury-Okoumba & Mafini, 2021). Loury-Okoumba and Mafini (2021) suggested adopting and implementing supply chain management (SCM) strategies to reduce high business operating costs and the rates of SME venture achievement in Gauteng. In addition, business growth in SMMEs was affected by internal environment factors, such as ***management of skills*** (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020).

The findings by Saah and Musvoto (2020) revealed that the ***high rate of SME failure and discontinuity*** in South Africa was mainly caused by the ***lack of knowledge of operational management***. In the same way, the quantitative study conducted by Saah and Musvoto (2020) with 400 small enterprise managers in the North West province of South Africa revealed that the majority, 58.5% SMEs were found to be not sustainable due to ***the ineffectiveness of the management***. In the North West province, ***poor management*** led SMEs to failure and discontinuation (Saah & Musvoto, 2020).

According to Blose and Okeke-Uzodike (2020), ***cash management*** records were the challenge of SMME business growth in the Msunduzi Municipality of SA. The speeding up of economic growth was found to be limited in small businesses in the BRICS countries, due to SME ***qualities*** regarding growth and survival upsurge (Davies & Van Vuuren, 2021). The high rate of SME failure and discontinuity was experienced in the North West province, mostly caused by the ***lack of ineffective management*** (Saah & Musvoto, 2020).

The above discussion indicates that the management of SMEs is still problematic and needs attention and improvement in an attempt to ensure the success of SMEs achieving their desired performance. The following section addresses business factors challenging OP achievement in SMEs.

4.7.3 Business factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.13.

Although business factors are the enablers of OP and sustainability in SMEs, as discussed in the above sections, however, SMEs remain challenged by ***business strategy*** (Lestari, et al., 2020) and its components, such as ***green business strategy*** (Leonidou, et al., 2017). The following subsection discusses the business challenges of OP achievement in the SA context.

- **Business challenges of organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

In the same way as the above statement, SA SMEs were found to be constrained by ***business incubation*** challenges (Van der Spuy & Bornman, 2023, 2024). For instance, the ***business environment*** affected the market share of SA SMMEs in the Msunduzi Municipality (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). SMEs were limited by an understanding of the ***business environment*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). On the contrary, Blose and Okeke-Uzodike's (2020) quantitative study revealed high competition as the challenge of SMEs operating in the Msunduzi Municipality. However, entrepreneurial factors discussed in the following subsection are other challenges of OP achievement.

4.7.4 Entrepreneurial factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.13.

EFs and constraints challenged SMEs' performance (Kanu, 2018; Kiran & Babu, 2019; Divakara, et al., 2019). As an illustration, a higher ***stakeholder orientation*** negatively affected the profitability of food and beverages, and household and personal products industries (Brulhart, et al., 2019). While in companies operating in the food manufacturing industry, a nonlinear relationship was found between ***entrepreneurial orientation*** and sales growth (Kohtamäki, et al., 2019). The next subsection reveals entrepreneurial factors that challenge the success of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Entrepreneurial factors challenging the achievement of organisational performance in South African small and medium enterprises**

Business growth in SA SMMEs was challenged by internal factors, such as ***entrepreneurial characteristics*** (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020), for instance, ***rural entrepreneurship*** (Lekhanya, 2018). The impact of ***entrepreneurial education*** on firm performance was not supported and insignificant (Marecha, 2020). To demonstrate, the quantitative study by Msomi et al. (2021) showed that the nonexistence of ***financial literacy*** challenged SA SME survival. Sales growth, gross profit, and return on investment were challenged by ***entrepreneurial particularities*** identified in SMEs operating in SA (Orlu, et al., 2018). The following section focuses on discussions on leadership challenges and OP achievement.

4.7.5 Leadership factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.14.

This section discusses leadership factors confronting the attainment of OP in SMEs. SMEs in Sweden were found to be challenged by leadership (Kindström, et al., 2022). For instance, the transformational style of leadership did not significantly influence performance of SMEs in Uganda; (Aketch, et al., 2017). In short, OP achievement of SMEs is challenged by ***leadership styles***. Likewise, found in SA SMEs as detailed in the subsection below.

- **Leadership factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

SMEs in the South African construction industry were also found to be challenged by ***leadership style*** (Mafundu & Mafini, 2019). SMMEs consistently suffer from lower performance levels and high levels of failure due to the lack of ***entrepreneurial leadership*** skills (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). SMMEs consistently suffer from lower performance levels and high levels of failure due to the lack of ***financial education*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). SMEs were limited by entrepreneurial leadership ***capabilities*** (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). The next section discusses the challenges of modernism in the achievement of OP.

4.7.6 Modernity factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.14.

This section discusses the findings of modernity literature and the OP achievement of SMEs. Indeed, several modernity challenges were noticeable in many SMEs which affected their performance, such as ***technological challenges*** (Haseeb et al., 2019; Hussain et al., 2019) and ***inadequate technology*** (Anderson, 2017). Moreover, the adoption of modern techniques was also observed, for instance, ***IT adoption*** (Eller, et al., 2020), big ***data analytics*** (Sivarajah, et al., 2017; Del Vecchio, et al., 2017), ***blockchain technology*** challenges (Diana, et al., 2024), ***Industry 4.0 technology*** (Önday, 2018; Prause, 2019; Ahmad, et al., 2019; Prause, 2020; Iqbal & Ahmad, 2021; Halim & Halim, 2021). For instance, in SMEs in China (Shi & Iqbal, 2021). Besides that, the Fourth Industrial Revolution brought numerous challenges to firms (Azevedo & Santiago, 2019). In addition to these, ***digitalisation challenges*** for SMEs (Eller, et al., 2020), as well as ***ICT*** challenges in Zimbabwe (Makiwa & Steyn, 2018). Furthermore. modernity challenges and the realisation of OP in SA SMEs are detailed in the subsection below.

- **Modernity factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

This subsection discusses various modernism factors that challenge the achievement of OP in SA SMEs. According to Mhlongo and Daya (2023), SMMEs consistently suffer from lower performance levels and high levels of failure due to the lack of technology. ***Investment in technology*** was found to be the challenge of SA SMEs located in the Msunduzi Municipality (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020).

The SMEs ability to integrate their ***IT infrastructure*** with the scope of their IT architecture was found to be very low in SA (Du Plessis & Marnewick, 2017). In the same way, SA SMEs were mostly challenged by ***IT incorporation*** into business processes (Ajibade & Mutula, 2019). Moreover, in SA SMEs, successful IT infrastructure integration and implementation into the business process were affected by the lack of partnerships (Ajibade & Mutula, 2019).

Ajibade and Mutula (2019) found that SA SMEs were incapable of using their IT infrastructure successfully for the enhancement of communication, obstructing their efficiency. Such situations might affect the amount and level of their productivity. Then, for the better operational performance, SMEs operating in SA should consider investment in upgrading their IT infrastructure, and in training programmes for the use of IT infrastructure that will benefit their employees' performance but also adequate communication at all organisational levels, which in turn could enable the overall OP cycle.

Blose and Okeke-Uzodike (2020) adopted a quantitative approach and resource-based view to conduct an exploratory and descriptive study on SMEs' factors impacting the growth of SMMEs in the Msunduzi Municipality. They found that ***pre-fourth industrial revolution (4IR)*** was the challenge for the Msunduzi Municipality SMEs, for the market share and the production process of SMMEs. Moreover, the authors acknowledge the existence of various degrees of internal and external challenges that face SMMEs in the readiness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and suggested prior preparation to the disruptive digital revolution challenges from their owners or managers. size, assets, sales, production output and market share where there are patterns of SA SMME growth, however, the number of employees was rarely used as an indicator of success (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). As for Lekhanya

(2018), SA SMEs were challenged by ***digitalisation***. A quantitative study by Mqutheni and Pillay (2021) revealed that ***connectivity*** in SA SMEs was critical. SME performance was confronted by ***e-commerce*** (Kunene, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, to ascertain the South African SMEs' executives' perception of the Wireless Open Access Network policy and investor confidence relationships, Mqutheni and Pillay (2021) followed a qualitative study. They concluded that the policy of ***communication media*** of SA SMEs did not reach a wider audience with the Wireless Open Access Network. In addition, Mqutheni and Pillay (2021), suggested OP of Wireless Open Access Network (WOAN) in SA was negatively affected by ***employees' perceptions***.

The above dimensions showed that adaptation to modernism is still a problem for SA SMEs. These issues need to be addressed, likewise, corrective measures need to be taken for possible improvements. Sustainable factors confronting OP achievement in SA SMEs are listed in the next section.

4.7.7 Sustainable factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.14.

In this section, the sustainable factors challenging OP achievement in SMEs are discussed. There exist sustainability-related factors that challenge the attainment of OP in SMEs. To illustrate, ***sustainable performance*** was considered a challenge in SMEs in China (Shi & Iqbal, 2021). ***Social challenges*** affected SME performance in Malaysia (Haseeb, et al., 2019) and China (Hussain et al., 2019). Moreover, a study by Akter, et al. (2020) conducted in Bangladesh demonstrated that the company's support towards the local community did not bring inputs to the performance of the company.

The performance of SMEs is challenged by ***sustainable development*** (Endris & Kassegn, 2022). For instance, during the early stages of SME development, most end under sustainability initiative conditions given that their chances to survive are reduced by the pursuit of destructive ***green initiatives*** (Amankwah-Amoah & Syllias, 2020). ***Risk management*** enabled

sustainability in Sri Lanka (Wijethilake & Lama, 2019). The achievement of sustainable business performance and a sustainable competitive advantage in SMEs in Malaysia as SMEs faced ***social challenges*** (Haseeb, et al., 2019). The following sub-section addresses sustainable factors challenging the achievement of OP in SA SMEs.

- **Sustainable factors challenging organisational performance achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

Environmental factors affected the business growth of SMMEs in the Msunduzi Municipality (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). In SA, the ***turbulent economic business environment*** was the sustainable factor negatively impacting SMEs functioning in Cape Town (Furawo & Scheepers, 2018). Meanwhile, the quantitative study conducted by Bag, et al. (2021) amongst the SA SMEs in the manufacturing sector revealed no relationship between ***green supply chain management*** GSCM practices and performance. Similarly, Epoh and Mafini (2018) found ***green supply chain dimensions*** were not linked to ecological performance, in other words, GSC cannot influence the achievement of sustainability, and more precisely, environmental sustainability.

Bornman and Ramutumbu (2019) revealed that SME size but also ***social norms,*** were embraced in a high risk of non-compliance. Even worse, small firms in SA focused on business ***risk*** and operations without knowing several other risk types (Krüger, et al., 2020). Market share was the ***internal environment*** factor challenging business growth in SMMEs in the Msunduzi Municipality (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020).

SMEs in SA were challenged by ***CSR*** activities implementation and SME owner perceptions (Wentzel, et al., 2023). Similarly, SME performance in KwaZulu-Natal was challenged by ***CSR*** (Chazireni, 2019). Chazireni's (2019) investigation on CSR in SMEs located in KwaZulu-Natal through a mixed methods study showed that SMEs were challenged by the disregard of social responsibility practice by business owners' ethical values, and the lack of dynamic ethical values, as well as a lack of social responsibility practice and implementation. The author suggested proactive encouragement from the chambers of commerce, local municipalities, and business leaders to address social responsibility practises in SMEs.

Conversely to the above, Matarirano, et al. ‘s (2019) quantitative study discovered that ***internal tax compliance costs*** were the biggest problems of small businesses, which strongly obstructed performance, while business performance was negatively affected by external tax compliance costs. The results proposed appropriate tax planning for small companies for the reduction of harmful effects and gaining profits related to tax compliance costs. A quantitative study conducted in the Msunduzi Municipality asserted that ***high taxes*** were a challenge to SA SMEs (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). ***Risk response*** was the challenge of SME's businesses operating in the Sedibeng District Municipal (Krüger et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Naude and Chiweshe (2017) adopted an exploratory study by conducting a literature review and developing an operational risk management framework with the potential of identifying and measuring risks, as well as taking corrective actions to mitigate these risks in SMEs’ operations. Operational; marketing; technical and financial risks were identified and classified from the literature review. As a result, there were no ***operational risk management frameworks*** for SMEs. SME owners and managers should look to tools for appraising and minimising their operational risks. Mogashoa and Selebi’s (2021) study discovered that small firms suddenly lagged behind medium and large-sized companies with ***risk management capabilities***.

The next section discusses the existing challenges to the sustainability of SMEs.

4.8 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 2b: CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are linked to Tables 4.12., 4.13 and 4.14 of this chapter.

This section discusses the findings associated with the **Research Objective 2b** which focused on the challenges impeding the attainment of sustainability of SMEs in South Africa. The discussions are the answers to the following question: ***Research Question R*****Q2b:** *What are the challenges impeding the attainment of sustainability of SMEs in South Africa?*

4.8.1 Corporate factors challenging sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.12.

This section discusses the corporate factors that challenged the achievement of OP of SMEs. The reviewed literature categorised the factors as corporate resources, corporate behaviours, and corporate practices, discussed below.

- **Corporate resources challenging sustainability achievement in small and medium enterprises**

From the reviewed literature findings, there are ***ten forms*** of corporate resources as OP enablers discussed below.

Korauš, et al. (2020) established that sustainable development in SMEs is challenged by the following organisational factors: sustainable business performance was found to be limited by ***resource challenges*** (Abid, et al., 2024), such as ***financial resources or financial capital*** (Nwonu et al., 2017; Sanchez & Sensini, 2017; Matias & Serrasqueiro, 2017; Md-Yusuf, 2017; Bamata & Fields, 2018; Nohong, et al., 2019; Vătămănescu, et al,, 2019; Cheong, et al., 2020; Sensini, 2020; Chalmers et al., 2020b; Islam, et al., 2022; Dasilas, 2024) and ***physical resources or capital*** (Mageto, et al., 2018; Acheampong & Hinson, 2019; You, et al., 2023), and ***financial resources or financial capital***.

Other resources challenging the achievement of sustainability include ***Human resources or human capital*** (Hoq & Chauha, 2017; Romanelli, 2017; Nwonu, et al., 2017; Chopra, 2017; Prange & Pinho, 2017; Al-Tabbaa & Ankrah, 2018; Irwin, et al., 2018; Ko & McKelvie, 2018; Dar & Mishra, 2019; Lee, 2019; Simić, et al., 2020; Yani, et al., 2020; Kazmi, et al., 2021; Asoba & Patricia, 2021; Munyanyi, et al., 2021; Jonck, 2023). The nonexistence ***of human resources*** was perceived as an obstacle to European SME engagement in circular economy (CE) activities (García-Quevedo, et al., 2020), similarly, a ***shortage of professional staff*** obstructed compliance with environmental responsibility (Ivashkivc et al., 2020).

Conversely to the above ***knowledge resources or capital*** (Naicker et al., 2017; Chinyamurindi & Gwena, 2018; Cardoni, et al., 2020; Singh, et al., 2021) was the challenge of sustainability success in SMEs. Pett, et al. (2024) sampled 392 SMEs in France, India, and the US. They found that financial performance was limited by ***knowledge transfer***. On the contrary, the risk of decreased business profitability, limited financing, and a ***lack of knowledge*** were some of the challenges obstructing compliances with environmental responsibility by SMEs' agricultural enterprises in Ukraine (Ivashkiv, et al., 2020).

Besides the above, other challenges included ***awareness resources or capital*** (Maziti, et al, 2018; Kimanzi, 2019; Akpan, et al., 2020; Gerald, et al., 2020; Tay & Aigbogun, 2024), ***intellectual resources or capital*** (Anwar, 2018; Kadir, et al., 2018; Vătămănescu, et al., 2019; Demartini & Beretta, 2020; Kroukamp & De Vries., 2020; Muda, et al., 2020; Prena & Kustina, 2020; Omotoyo, et al., 2020; Tanase & Sihara, 2023), ***talent resources or capital*** (Festing, et al., 2017; Pauli & Pocztowski, 2019; Hasan & Saufie, 2021; Bagorogoza & Nakasule, 2022; Park, 2022; Mudjijah, et al., 2022), ***perception resources or capital*** (Rambe & Ndofirepi, 2017; Makhitha, 2017; Mqutheni & Pillay, 2021), ***skills resources or capital*** (Rajarams, 2017; Mamabolo et al., 2017; Bushe, 2019; Sariwulan, et al., 2020; Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021), and ***corporate culture*** (Rafailidis, et al., 2017; Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Divakara & Surangi, 2018; Buccieri, et al., 2020; Miska, et al, 2018; Gorondutse & Hilman, 2019; Wu, et al., 2019; Buccieri, et al., 2020; Khedhaouria, et al., 2020; Le, et al., 2020; Mahfouz & Muhumed, 2020; Sawaean & Ali, 2020; Srisathan, et al,, 2020; Reino, et al., 2020; Rodríguez, et al., 2021; Ugheoke, 2021; Chowdhury, et al., 2022). To emphasise the above, ***organisational culture*** negatively predicted corporate sustainability practices in SMEs operating in Europe (Miska, et al., 2018).

The next subsection discusses corporate sustainability challenges for sustainability achievement in SA SMEs.

- **Corporate resources challenging sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Comparable to the above discussions, SA SMEs' sustainability was also confronted by accessibility to resources (Msomi, et al., 2021). To investigate the factors affecting SME

financial sustainability in South Africa, Msomi and Olarewaju (2021) purposively sampled 310 respondents. The findings revealed that SME financial sustainability was positively and significantly affected by ***access to finance, financial awareness, accounting skills and budgeting.*** Similarly, financial accessibility constrains the achievement of sustainability in the Ethekwini Metro (Cameron & Hoque, 2017; Oseifuah & Manda, 2017), as well as in operative SMEs in KwaZulu-Natal (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). Moreover, in SA a quantitative study by Msomi, et al. (2021) showed that the lack of understanding of basic monetary terms affected SA SME sustainability.

However, there was a need for organising training, workshops, and seminars for financial literacy that led to the improvement of owners' ability to meet the eligibility criteria and conditions for a loan from financial establishments. Furthermore, owners of small companies use accounting and budgeting skills and allocate funds for the regular training and development of financial experts' services. The subsequent subsection discusses the challenges of the corporate factors associated with the achievement of sustainability of SMEs.

- **Corporate practices challenging sustainability achievement in small and medium enterprises**

From the findings of the reviewed literature, ***corporate practices*** to achieve the sustainability of SMEs are discussed in this subsection. There are ***s***everal ***corporate practices*** challenging SMEs' sustainability (Naicker, et al., 2017), such as ***management involvement and commitment*** will increase the success rates of a Six Sigma programme/project in SMEs, as will all the following ***training, cultural change, project prioritisation*** and ***selection of tools and techniques*** linking Six Sigma to ***business strategy,*** linking Six Sigma to ***customers, customer focus and requirements,*** and quality data and reporting, ***communication, organisational infrastructure and resources,*** and ***project management skills*** (Singh & Singh, 2020).

Furthermore, other challenging factors include ***institutional challenges*** (Hristov, et al., 2022). Zhang et al. (2022) indicated that ***innovation*** could not improve SME profitability indirectly through environmental performance. In other words, environmental sustainability might be

challenged by innovation. The next subsection discusses corporate practices challenging the sustainability of SA SMEs.

- **Corporate practices challenging sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises**

Based on the literature ***corporate practices*** challenged ***social sustainability*** (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Syed, 2019). Ayandibu, et al. (2019) conducted interviews with entrepreneurs to evaluate the constraints hindering SME sustainability in Durban. The findings revealed some challenges that hindered small firms and limited the economic growth of SMEs in Durban and led them to a high rate of business failure (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). Orlu, et al.'s (2018) results showed no significant association between diversification and sustainable performance among pig-farming SMMEs in the Central Free State of South Africa. Concerning the risky nature of diversification decisions, it is recommended that to maximise the probability of success, careful examination of all critical factors motivating this option.

In a non-empirical study, it was found that the South African SMMEs' effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in the future were challenged by the non-existence of knowledge sharing (Naicker, et al., 2017), which has been considered a value-adding initiative, however, it was found to be non-value added in their companies. The next section discusses managerial challenges to achieve sustainability.

4.8.2 Managerial factors challenging sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.13.

In this section, managerial challenges in achieving sustainability are discussed. The reviewed literature unveiled that poor coordination affected the sustainability of SMEs (Wakeman, et al., 2022). The following subsection below discusses managerial factors challenging the sustainability of SA SMEs.

- **Managerial factors challenging sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

Grounded in sociological entrepreneurship theory, the qualitative study by Ayandibu et al. (2019) assessed constraints hindering sustainability in SA small enterprises operating in Durban. They found that ***poor planning*** and ***poor management*** were found to be the challenges of SME sustainability in Durban (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). The majority of 58.5% is not likely to be sustainable due to ineffective management in the North West province (Saah & Musvoto, 2020). According to Van Der Poll (2022), environmental ***management accounting practices*** were found to be barriers to the adoption of sustainable development of SMEs. In addition to this, sustainability was challenged by business factors as discussed in the following section.

4.8.3 Business factors challenging sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.13.

This section discusses some business factors that were considered challenges of SME sustainability achievement. To illustrate, the study by Aghelie (2017) disclosed ***green business*** practices as a limitation of SA SME sustainability. Wong and Ngai (2021) found that ***business sustainability competence*** was affected by business sustainability capabilities, which included environmental and economic competencies in the fashion and textile industries. ***Ecological and economic competencies*** were business sustainability capabilities that affected business sustainability competence in the fashion and textile industries (Wong & Ngai, 2021). Besides these findings, no other business factors were mentioned as challenges to SMEs. Further research could be essential. Nevertheless, the following subsection reveals what was found in the literature in the SA context.

- **Business factors challenging sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

Contrary to the above, no literature was available for review on OP of SA SMEs' business challenges. This may be an opportunity for further research to identify business challenges that

organisations operating in this sector face. The next section discusses the entrepreneurial challenges in the sustainability success of SMEs.

4.8.4 Entrepreneurial challenges of sustainability in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.13.

This section discusses the findings of entrepreneurial factors challenging the sustainability success of SMEs. The analysis by Sundström, et al. (2020) based on an applied market-oriented business model unveiled that implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) was challenged by ***market intelligence***. This might be considered as a component of business intelligence. In like fashion, the following section discusses the findings of entrepreneurial challenges in the context of sustainability.

- **Entrepreneurial challenges of sustainability in South African small and medium enterprises**

Marecha (2020) found that entrepreneurs paid more attention to financial performance than to growing employee numbers, attesting to SME survival orientation. The non-appearance of ***entrepreneurial education*** retarded the much-needed economic growth in SMEs operating in Gauteng (Marecha, 2020). Similarly, a lack of full understanding about factors advancing ***entrepreneurial behaviour*** among SA small companies (Dele-Ijagbulu, et al., 2020). However, the quantitative study by Msomi, (2021) showed that the non-existence of ***financial literacy*** challenged the sustainability of SA SMEs. In addition, the motivation of **entrepreneurship** related to the environment was not measured carefully (Dele-Ijagbulu, et al., 2020).

This might have a negative environmental impact on the businesses' operational environment. Nevertheless, other factors, like leadership, also challenged the achievement of sustainability of SMEs as discussed in the next section.

4.8.5 Leadership challenges of sustainability in South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.14.

Pett, et al. (2024) sampled 392 SMEs in France, India, and the US. They found that ecological performance was hindered by ***leadership***. In the same manner, there were some leadership factors challenging the achievement of sustainability of SMEs in SA as discussed below.

- **Leadership as a challenge of sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

Fatoki (2020) found that ethical leadership was linked to the insignificant environmental sustainability of SMEs. Similarly, turnover intention was decreased by ***unethical leadership*** (Mitonga-Monga et al., 2019). This demonstrates that the leadership of SA SMEs is still a problem that needs to be addressed in future. Besides leadership challenges, the next subsection addresses the issue of modernity associated with the sustainability of SMEs operating globally.

4.8.6 Modernity challenges of sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.14.

Some modernism challenges limit the achievement of sustainability in SMEs. For instance, ***technological challenges*** obstruct SMEs operating in Malaysia from attaining a sustainable competitive advantage and business performance (Haseeb, et al., 2019). Sustainable ***Industry 4.0*** affected operations and supply chain management oriented towards the 2030 Agenda (Caiado, et al., 2022). Modernity factors challenging sustainability achievement in SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Modernity challenges of sustainability achievement in South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA, the non-use of ***suitable technology*** was amongst the challenges confronting sustainability in small companies, especially in Durban (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). Ajibade and Mutula (2019) used a quantitative method to critically evaluate the level of business and IT infrastructure alignment in Nigerian and SA SMEs. They revealed the lack of effective use of ***IT infrastructure*** to improve the sustainability of SMEs. In SA, Blose and Okeke-Uzodike (2020) revealed that ***pre-Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)*** was the challenge for the Msunduzi Municipality SMEs, and not only for economy transformation. In SA, many social spheres are affected by the emergence of the ***Fourth Industrial Revolution*** (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020), which challenged the business environment of SA SMEs located in the Msunduzi Municipality. The lack of appropriate technology was the challenge of SMEs in Durban, impacting their sustainability (Ayandibu, et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there were also sustainable factors challenging the achievement of sustainability of SA SMEs, as discussed in the following section.

4.8.7 Sustainable challenges of sustainability achievement of South African small and medium enterprises

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.14.

Numerous studies, such as Jaramillo and Sossa (2019), Alcalde-Heras, et al. (2019) and Caiado, et al. (2022), debated barriers to the sustainability achievement of SMEs. The ***global crisis*** challenged the sustainability crises (Syed, 2019) in the same way ***environmental turbulence*** did (Taghizadeh, et al., 2023).

The main limitations of CSR in addressing SDGs were as follows: the selective implementation of SDGs, greenwashing, the lack of integration of stakeholders, the lack of incorporation of SMEs, and the difference in CSR practices among countries (Lu, et al., 2021). Agricultural SME firms in Ukraine were challenged by the pressure of rising ecological responsibility levels for guaranteeing companies' sustainable development (Ivashkiv, et al., 2020). But the

predominant initial stage of the application of ecological responsibility principles in the operations of agricultural SME enterprises in Ukraine was challenging (Ivashkiv, et al., 2020).

Iranian SMEs were obstructed by the adoption of ***lean principles*** (Moradlou & Perera, 2017), whereas ***sustainability engagement*** challenged its achievement in SMEs (Kasiri, et al., 2020). In addition, there are social challenges in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage and sustainable business performance (Haseeb, et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the resulting ***environmental, social, and economic challenges*** (Hristov, et al., 2022), have made the issue of sustainability more relevant than ever before, touching every aspect of our lives. Similarly, to the current discussion, the subsection below discusses sustainable factors challenging the achievement of sustainability in SA SMEs.

- **Sustainable factors challenging the achievement of sustainability in South African small and medium enterprises**

According to Epoh and Mafini (2018), ***green supply chain dimensions*** were not linked to ecological performance, in other words, green supply chain (GSC) cannot influence the achievement of performance. Moreover, the Global pandemic has negative influence on SMEs in the worldwide (Naidoo, 2021). The lockdown was the causes of many SMEs losses such finance, and particularly in SA, many SMEs shut down during COVID-19, lockdown Stage 5 (Naidoo, 2021). This showed that global crises constrained the sustainability achievement of SA SMEs. The next section is devoted to the implementation of sustainability in the OP of SMEs.

4.9 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 3: PHASES FOR SUSTAINABILITY IMPLEMENTATION IN ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are linked to Table 4.15 of this chapter.

Although the reviewed literature demonstrated sustainability aspects implemented in the performance of SMEs, however, none of those studies revealed the consecutive phases for such adoption. Thus, this section discusses the various aspects of sustainability implemented in SMEs and SA SMEs and suggests the possibility of having phases for successful implementation of sustainability in such sectors. It should be noted that the discussions of this section were connected to Research Objective 3 and were the answers to the following research question:

***Research question R*Q3)** *What are the phases for implementing sustainability in SMEs in South Africa?*

The section discusses the following: implementation of sustainable development, sustainable development goals, organisational change, circular economy, lean management, sustainable corporate responsibility, sustainable corporate responsibility, and sustainable supply chain management, as well as the implementation of other related sustainability practices. The following section discusses sustainable development (SD) implementation.

4.9.1 Implementation of sustainable development (SD) in South African small and medium enterprises

The findings from the literature review revealed that the implementation of sustainability included the ***adoption of sustainability*** (Journeault, et al., 2021) and the adoption of ***sustainability concept***s (Marková, et al, 2017). The adoption of sustainability can play an important role of considering environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects of business at all performance levels. The adoption of sustainability concepts might help managers and employees to understand sustainability within the business context.

Many sustainability aspects were implemented in SMEs, such as ***sustainable development*** (Gerrans & Hutchinson, 2017; Yahaya, et al., 2017; Endris & Kassegn, 2022) of SMEs nested in EU countries (Bassi & Dias, 2020), in Thailand (Phonthanukitithaworn, et al., 2023), which included ***sustainable development practices*** implemented in Coimbatore's SMEs (Maheswari & Nandagopal. 2018), MSMEs operating in sub-Saharan Africa (Endris & Kassegn, 2022) and across a group of EU countries (Bassi & Dias, 2020), ***sustainable development analysis*** adopted by SMEs in the supply chain of multinational companies (Turekulova, et al., 2022),

corporate sustainable development enhancement realised by Seroka-Stolka & Fijorek (2020), and ***economic development*** adopted by Nigerian SMEs (Yahaya, et al., 2017).

The implementation of sustainable development practices might enable the implementation of ecological, economic, social and cultural practices that can lead to sustainable performance practices. Sustainable development analysis might help SME managers to make useful and good decisions about the company's sustainability. The following subsection discusses sustainable development (SD) implementation in SA SMEs.

- **Implementation of sustainable development in South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA, Masocha and Fatoki (2018) conducted a survey of SMEs located in Limpopo province which revealed that the ecology influenced the three SD pillars, specifically environmental, economic, and social in a noteworthy way, and suggested the operationalisation of SD given the ecological influential factors. In the same way, through the adoption of non-probability sampling and ***implementation of sustainable development practices*** in SA. Masocha (2019) surveyed the role of forces shaping normative ecology on SMEs. The author revealed that the participation of SMEs in environmental, social, and economic practices was impacted by normative ecological forces.

Normative environmental forces are important as they help SA SMEs to operate effectively while complying with the environmental norms, such as minimising pollution through gas emission reduction, reducing waste by applying circular economy methods, and keeping the business environment clean through advanced purification, sanitation, and drainage techniques.

The following section discusses the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4.9.2 Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in South African small and medium enterprises

In this section, from the reviewed literature the discussions revealed the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in SMEs and those in SA SMEs. On the contrary to the above discussions on ***SDGs*** (Arnold, 2018; Isabirye & Hewitt, 2022; Islam, et al., 2022: Nasir, et al., 2022; Hung & Chen, 2023), led to building customer-brand relationships and the development of a competitive advantage for SMEs operating in developing countries (Auemsuvarn, 2019), and the influence of business operations through cost and risk reduction and access to resources (Cherroun & Cherroun, 2022)**,** which influenced Nigerian SMEs functioning in Enugu State (Nwokocha & Nwankwo, 2019). The SDGs provide a framework for businesses to act responsibly.

Although the SDGs are an international agenda, they emphasise that local organisations and national governments should implement them through their business plans and policies (Fonseca, et al., 2022). By working toward the SDGs (Sinkovics, et al., 2022), many SMEs, for example in Scotland, were empowered to embrace the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (Fonseca, et al., 2022). For instance, Taiwanese SMEs were determined to attain the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (Hung & Chen, 2023); these motivations led to the implementation of SDGs in SMEs (Lu, et al., 2021; Berrone, et al., 2023), MSMEs (Virmani, et al., 2022), in small multinational enterprises (Van Tulder, et al., 2021), in the Basque Country (Jiménez, et al., 2021), in Portuguese SME organisations (Fonseca, et al., 2023), in UK global businesses (Williams & Murphy 2023), and SMEs in the European region (Fonseca et al., 2022). Moreover, et al. (2019) implemented the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Poland's SMEs, whereas advanced UN SDGs were executed in Nigeria (Adeola, et al., 2021).

To implement the UN SDGs effectively, SMEs need to set organisational goals that correspond to the SDGs. Those goals should fit the financial, operational, market and growth performance goals. The section below discusses SDG implementation in SA SMEs.

- **Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in South African small and medium enterprises**

Although the above discussion revealed that SDGs were implemented in SMEs, nevertheless, no study revealed the implementation of SDGs in SA SMEs. This needs the attention of scholars for future research. However, the implementation of organisational change is discussed in the next section.

4.9.3 Implementation of organisational change in South African small and medium enterprises

In the search of sustainability implementation for the performance of SMEs, studies by Kuusela, et al. (2017), Stouten, et al., (2018), Sarkar and Osiyevskyy (2018), Liao, et al. (2018), Kiesnere and Baumgartner (2019), Chebbi, et al. (2020), Errida and Lotfi (2021), Ichsan, et al., (2021), Karácsony, et al. (2023), Ketemaw and Amente (2023), Luu (2023) and Alsharari (2024) revealed that ***organisational change*** was implemented in SMEs and was demonstrated through ***organisational change management*** (Wiesner, et al., 2018; Mitra, et al., 2019; Ufua, et al., 2020; Idogawa et al., 2023; Shynu, et al., 2023; Chatzinikolaou & Vlados, 2024), ***business model changes*** (Cucculelli & Peruzzi, 2020), and ***business model adaptations*** (Brunelli, et al., 2023).

Change in organisation is very important. Positive changes can lead to positive results, while negative changes will produce negative outcomes. Positive organisational change can influence all aspects of performance. At the operational level, it can improve the following: the production process, techniques of production, quality of products, quality of services, and workers' behaviour and performance effectiveness. At the financial performance level, OC can lead to positive change in the management of finances by managers or company owners. At the market level, OC can improve the following, sales volume, loyalty, employees and customer satisfaction, and the relationship between the company with its shareholders, competitors and customers which will provide a positive image of the company. At the growth level, OC might enable the improvement of the company effectiveness and efficiency. Similar to the discussions in this section, the next section discusses OC implementation in SA SMEs.

- **Implementation of organisational change (OC) in South African small and medium enterprises**

In SA, the descriptive survey by Chukwuma, et al. (2023) found that ***change*** was implemented in the ***leadership styles.*** Change management leadership was effective for the operations of the selected automobile dealerships in the Durban Metropolitan region of KwaZulu-Natal. Positive changes in the management leadership have the potential of a positive influence on the overall OP of SMEs. The following section discusses the implementation of sustainable development (SD) and sustainable circularity. Conversely to the current discussions, the next ones focus on sustainable circularity adoption (SC).

4.9.4 Implementation of sustainable circularity in South African small and medium enterprises

This section discusses the findings on the adoption of sustainable circularity (SC) in SMEs. The literature revealed that ***circular economy*** was adopted in SMEs (Scarpellini, et al., 2020; Suchek, et al., 2022; Zhu, et al., 2022; Zhang, et al., 2022). For instance, in European SMEs (Demirel & Danisman, 2019), in MSME (Virmani, et al., 2022)., and specifically its practices were observed in some small companies (Le, Behl & Pereira, 2022), for example, SMEs in European Union countries (Bassi & Dias, 2020), Vietnam (Chowdhury, et al., 2022a, b), and India (Sohal, et al., 2022). Further, Gennari (2022) and Zhu, et al. (2022) developed a circular economy framework for SMEs. However, García-Quevedo, et al. (2020) acknowledged the rarity of CE implementation in SMEs and therefore, identified management and corporate governance aspects that obstructed CE adoption in European SMEs.

To overcome the rarity of CE implementation, SMEs need to incorporate strategies that can enable the integration of CE into overall performance, and particularly, operational. It is suggested that SME managers learn about CE implementation through national and international symposiums., and after that they should teach their employees how this technique can be applied, and they can invest in employee training regarding CE implementation. Circular economy implementation in SA is discussed in the subsection below.

- **Implementation of the circular economy in South African small and medium enterprises**

Bag, et al. (2021) adopted a quantitative approach to survey 240 people working in SMEs in the manufacturing sector to discover the relationships between institutional pressures, such as ***eco-innovation, green supply chain management (GSCM) practices***, and ***CE capability***; as a result, coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures were positively related to ***eco-innovation***. Circular Economy (CE) capability was built by eco-innovation and green supply chain management (GSCM). CE implementation led to eco-innovation in SA SMEs. This indicates the inputs of CE in SA SMEs.

Furthermore, the CE is the origin of the concept of the 3Rs, i.e. reduce, reuse, and recycle. CE might play an important role at the operational level of SA SMEs. For instance, in the reduction of waste of natural and non-natural resources, such as water, electricity, and raw materials. CE might positively influence financial performance by reducing expenditure involved in production, and increasing profitability and savings. Thus, CE might be considered an enabler of the financial performance achievement of SA SMEs. The next section discusses the implementation of lean management.

4.9.5 Implementation of lean management in South African small and medium enterprises

The reviewed literature on sustainability implementation in the OP revealed that ***lean management*** (LM) of sustainability practices was adopted by SMEs. For instance, Yadav, et al. (2019) proved that ***lean practices*** impacted operational performance in Indian SMEs. Likewise, ***LM practices*** impact sustainability performance, which was established in British SMEs (Dey, et al., 2020). The impact of ***social and technical lean practices*** on SME performance was demonstrated by Arumugam, et al. (2022) in a study conducted on Indian SME manufacturing in the automobile industry. In the same way, Abdallah et al. (2021) revealed the impact of ***social and technical LM*** on the operational performance of manufacturing SMEs affiliated with diverse Jordanite (mineral) industry types.

Lean management can be useful in SME performance. At the financial level, it might improve the company's assets and profitability. It might minimise finance management waste and maximise value through savings and new assets. At the operational level, LM might assist SMEs in minimising waste through material recycling and reuse, and maximising value through new ideas and innovation inputs to the production process, methods and technologies that will lead to the improvement of goods and services.

At the MP level, to minimise waste, SMEs should reduce the number of unnecessary suppliers by retaining important partnerships and relationship building, and replacing unproductive employees with skilled and competent workers. At the GP level, the implementation of lean might minimise waste through the reduction of costs associated with implementing training programmes. For instance, employees can attend online conferences instead of spending on flight tickets, accommodation and allowances for the same meetings. It is costly to have all employees travelling at the same time; therefore, value can be added to the company by having all employees attend the online meeting.

In SMEs in the manufacturing industries in the Midlands, United Kingdom, it was found that ***LM practices*** and sustainably oriented innovation impacted sustainability performance (Dey et al., 2020b) and at the same time, ***lean practices*** improved process innovation and supply chain sustainability (Dey, et al., 2019; 2020a) which are the processes of the companies' operational performance dimension. However, Kosasih et al.'s (2023) findings recognised the absence of empirical research studies on the performance of lean- and green practices of manufacturing SMEs. This might call for the attention of academics and company managers.

Furthermore, Bianchi et al. (2018) tested ***lean dynamic performance management systems*** designed for SMEs operating in the city business centre of Palermo, Italy. While Thanki and Thakkar (2020) explored ***lean–green performance*** of SME manufacturing in India. Yuik and Puvanasvaran (2020) developed a framework for the implementation of ***lean manufacturing*** in Malaysian machinery and equipment SMEs. Similarly, an effective framework was developed for ***lean strategies implementation and lean-excellence business management*** suitable for manufacturing SMEs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Mohammad & Oduoza, 2020). Moradlou and Perera (2017) identified barriers obstructing ***lean principles*** implementation in Iranian SMEs. Kosasih, et al. (2023) incorporate lean-green practices into manufacturing SMEs.

Lean principles should be integrated into SMEs, which will allow the implementation of lean practices by employees and LM practices by managers and owners. Lean principles will also help SMEs to improve. The next subsection discusses lean management (LM) implementation in SA SMEs.

- **Implementation of lean management in South African small and medium enterprises**

The above discussions demonstrate that lean management systems, practices, and frameworks have mostly been adopted by SMEs operating outside of Africa. One might say that such practice is still new and still to be implemented in the African context, and more precisely in SA SMEs. Indeed, this is a call for potential research. The next section concentrates on the discussions regarding the implementation of sustainable corporate governance (SCG) in SMEs.

4.9.6 Implementation of sustainable corporate governance in South African small and medium enterprises

In the next section, the discussion is on the multiple forms of sustainable corporate governance (SCG) found in the reviewed literature.

- **Corporate governance enabling organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

OP was achieved through ***corporate governance (CG)*** (Rodrigues, et al., 2020; Akhtar, et al., 2023). For instance, in European countries (Kostyuk & Barros, 2018), such as in Italian innovative SMEs (Zopounidis, et al., 2023), in Estonian SMEs (Lukason & Vissak, 2020), in Islamic banks (Nawaz, 2019), in Pakistan's automobile sector (PeiZhi & Ramzan, 2020), in Egypt (Ragab & Saleh, 2022), in Ghana (Sarpong-Danquah et al., 2022); in Nigeria (Chijoke-Mgbame, et al., 2020; Ozili, 2020), in Zimbabwe (Nyakurukwa, 2022), and in SME value creation (Yar Hamidi & Machold, 2020). CG helps SMEs have responsible and ethical behaviour towards their employees, partners, stakeholders, shareholders and customers. This will enable the achievement of FP, OPP, MP and GP.

To achieve OP, various forms of CG were used, such as ***good CG principles*** (Nejatollahi, et al., 2022) in Pakistan (Tabassum & Singh, 2021), ***CG system*** implementation in a Mexican company (Vargas-Hernández & Cruz, 2018), ***CG practice*** in Italy (Merendino & Melville, 2019), ***voluntary CG*** (Dasilas. 2023), external ***corporate governance*** (Shi, et al., 2017), ***CG disclosure*** (Rossignoli, et al., 2021), ***CG compliance*** in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2020), ***CG policy*** in US, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and Indonesia (Brahmana, et al., 2018), and governance ***norms*** in India (Goel, 2018). This might indicate that SME managers who willingly operate freely and reach their performance level successfully comply with the state regulations.

Besides the above practices, human capital involvement in CG might help realise the performance of SMEs. This was done through ***governance structures*** for instance, in SMEs in the Ghanaian manufacturing, telecommunication, and financial sectors (Okofo-Darteh & Asamoah, 2020), which encompassed ***the board characteristics*** in conventional and Islamic banks (Alam, et al., 2020), ***the characteristics of boards of directors (BoDs)*** in Italian SMEs (Merendino & Melville, 2019; Teti & Montefusco, 2022), and India (Goel, 2018), ***board of directors' appointments*** (Nejatollahi, et al., 2022), ***board diversity*** in the Pakistan textile sector (Khan, et al., 2019), and in Malaysia (Khatib & Nour, 2021). There exist various kinds of boards. SMEs should ensure that only skilled and competent business members are involved in the CG team, with the duty of ensuring the company complies with the business rules and ethics.

To illustrate ***women on the boards*** of some SMEs (Lagasio & Cucari, 2019), ***board size*** (Lagasio & Cucari, 2019), such as in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Pillai & Al-Malkawi, 2018), in the Pakistan textile sector (Khan, et al., 2019), ***boards of directors' tasks*** in SMEs' value creation (Hamidi & Machold, 2020), ***board independence*** (Lagasio & Cucari, 2019), such as in the Pakistan textile sector (Khan, et al., 2019) ***board meetings*** in Malaysia (Khatib & Nour, 2021), in Pakistan textile sector (Khan, et al., 2019), ***number of board meetings*** (Lagasio & Cucari, 2019), ***and number of board committees*** in the Pakistan textile sector (Khan, et al., 2019), as well as ***chief executive officer (CEO) duality*** (Lagasio & Cucari, 2019), and ***CEO's power*** in conventional and Islamic banks (Alam, et al., 2020). The chief executive officer or manager should ensure that the business is run in such a way to meet the goals set in terms of productivity, profitability, market and growth. They have the responsibility

of making the company's resources available and useful to the employees for the success of the company.

Furthermore, CG components influencing OP comprised ***earnings management*** in conventional and Islamic banks (Alam, et al, 2020), ***private equity*** of European PE-backed SMEs (Salerno, 2019), ***government shareholdings*** and ***leverage*** in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Pillai & Al-Malkawi, 2018), ***Shariah supervision*** in conventional and Islamic banks (Alam, et al., 2020), ***company ownership*** (Lagasio & Cucari, 2019), ***ownership*** of European PE-backed SMEs (Salerno, 2019), ***employee stock ownership plans*** of Chinese listed companies (Dasilas, 2024), ***audit type*** in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Pillai & Al-Malkawi, 2018), ***audit committee meetings*** in Malaysia (Khatib & Nour, 2021), ***ownership structure*** in Italian SMEs (Teti & Montefusco, 2022)., in Ghana (Sarpong-Danquah et al., 2022), ***capital structure*** (Dasilas. 2023), and ***government-backed venture capital funds*** or international venture capital funds in enabling new Chinese ventures (Hussain, Li & Scott, 2017). Similarly, the following subsection explains CG implementation in SA SMEs.

- **Implementation of corporate governance in the organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises**

The findings by Ouedraogo (2017), Sarah (2017), Hove-Sibanda, et al. (2017), Kroukamp and De Vries (2020); Van Zyl & Mans-Kemp (2020) demonstrated that good CG was advantageous to SMEs. Good CG is advantageous to SA SMEs; relationships with its stakeholders. It can also allow the integration of sustainability in performance dimensions, which can be considered as value added to each OP level. SMEs face difficulties in surviving and maintaining high performance, their CG assists SA SMEs to survive longer. The next subsection discusses the implementation of sustainable corporate governance.

- **Sustainable corporate governance implementation in small and medium enterprises**

Corporate governance aspects related to sustainability were implemented in the OP of SMEs. To illustrate, ***sustainability principles*** (Muñoz-Torres, et al., 2018; Fonseca, et al., 2022),

sustainable corporate governance (Tóth, et al., 2021), ***stakeholder-oriented corporate governance*** in Chinese SMEs (Zhang, et al., 2022), Japanese SMEs (Watanabel, et al., 2022), and ***green CG*** in SMEs operating in China (Wang, et al., 2023).

Social aspects of SME performance are covered by stakeholder-oriented corporate governance, while green corporate governance covers the companies' ecology, which allows them to operate following social and environmental norms, regulations, and ethics. Sustainability principles and sustainable corporate governance regulate the observation of ecological. economic, social, and cultural norms and ethics set for the performance of SMEs.

Besides the above, ***environmental, social and governance (ESG)*** (Bak, et al., 2022) was another aspect of sustainable corporate governance implemented in SMEs. For instance, ESG practices (Gholami, et al., 2022) in Italy (Clementino & Perkins, 2021). About ***ESG practices***, Akhtar, et al., (2023) demonstrated the effect of ESG practices on financial performance in Malaysian manufacturing SMEs. Similarly, Cek and Eyupoglu (2020) supported that economic performance was influenced by ***ESG practices***, and the impact of ***ESG practices*** disclosure on SME sustainability performance in Saudi Arabia, as evaluated by Shalhoob and Hussainey (2022). ***ESG behaviour*** was adopted by European companies (Iamandi, et al., (2019).

These SCG aspects might not be able to control the financial and cultural norms to be complied with by SMEs since such norms are environmentally and socially oriented. Hence, for a CG to be sustainable, the integration of financial and cultural aspects into the corporate governance of the organisation is a requirement. In other words, economic and cultural governance (ECG) norms, regulations and ethics should be generated. The following subsection addresses the implementation of sustainable corporate governance in South African SMEs.

- **Implementation of sustainable corporate governance in South African small and medium enterprises**

None of the following aspects including sustainable corporate governance, sustainability principles, stakeholder-oriented corporate governance, green corporate governance and ESG were found in the literature focusing on SA SMEs. This shows the necessity of covering these gaps through research. Moreover, for sustainable SME performance, future research should

consider demonstrating how economic and cultural governance (ECG) could be generated and implemented by organisations in general and SMEs in particular. The next section discusses sustainable corporate responsibility (SCR) implementation.

4.9.7 Implementation of sustainable corporate responsibility in South African small and medium enterprises

This section discusses various forms of sustainable corporate responsibility (SCR) implemented by SMEs, which include corporate social responsibility (CSR), tax compliance, risk taking and management. The subsection below discusses CSR implementation.

- **Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in small and medium enterprises**

Multiple SCR practices were found to be implemented in SMEs performance, more precisely: ***social responsibility,*** 1) in Malaysia (Nejati, et al., 2017), ***CSR*** (Colovic, et al., 2019; Khan, et al., 2019; Ahmad, et al., 2020; Kelliher, et al, 2020; Bacinello, et al., 2021; Pekovic & Vogt, 2021; Magrizos, et al., 2021; Thanh, et al., 2021; Vives, 2022; Ngo & Le, 2023; Oduro, et at., 2024; Seeletse, 2024; Dzage & Szabados, 2024; Muliati, et al., 2024), for instance, companies in the city of Guaymas Sonorain in Mexico (Valdez-Juárez, et al., 2018) in the UK (Stoian & Gilman, 2017), in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Pillai & Al-Malkawi, 2018), in developed and transition countries (Colovic, et al., 2019), family firms (Ahmad, et al., 2020), Brazil (Bacinello, et al., 2021); in a south-eastern European country (Magrizos, et al., 2021), in the developed and emerging country context (Thanh, et al., 2021). CSR aims at the realisation of social practices towards the community neighbouring the business. Thus, CSR might be considered an important input to the market and financial performance dimensions. At the market level, social and philanthropic activities might allow SMEs to attract and retain customers, which will lead to the achievement of FP of ROS.

2) ***CSR initiatives*** were implemented (Aldehayyata, 2021), 3) ***socially responsible supplier development*** (Wu, 2017), 4) ***small business social responsibility*** (Soundararajan, et al,, 2018), 5) ***stakeholder corporate social responsibility orientation*** congruence (Tang & Tang, 2018), 6) ***sustainable social responsibility*** (Khan, et al., 2019; Ahmad et al., 2020), and 7) ***environmental CSR*** (Chuang & Huang, 2018), 8) ***environmental responsibility*** (Lee, et al.,

2018; Ivashkiv, et al., 2020; Vives, 2022; Muliati et al., 2024), and 9) ***accountability mechanisms*** (Kelliher, et al., 2020). ***CSR*** in Nigeria was addressed by Chijoke-Mgbame, et al. (2020). Both environmental and social responsibilities might help SMEs be responsible towards the ecology and the people who live near the business setting. SMEs should decrease gas emissions, polluted water drainage, and the spread of production debris in the business environment. In the following two subsections, the findings of sustainable corporate responsibility implemented in SA SMEs are discussed.

Corporate responsibility in South African small and medium enterprises

Corporate responsibility makes OP possible in SA SMEs. For instance, through a descriptive and quantitative design, Ncube and Zondo (2018) examined determinant factors influencing business owners' self-motivation for SME growth in the furniture manufacturing sector located in the eThekwini District Municipality in SA. As a result, the intrinsic motivational factors included self-motivation, growth ambition, ***responsibility-taking*** for business enlargement, innovative solutions for problems associated with business growth achievement, rising business for recognition, development requirement, risk taking for business growth, belief in the desired production results, and action for business growth enabled business development and SMEs' growth, which stimulated creativity. The achievement of growth through these factors leads SMEs to sales growth, stability, efficiency, and effectiveness. Moreover, creativity may contribute to innovation at the operational level, while belief in the expected products adds to the productivity success. The next subsection discusses the implementation of CSR in SA SMEs.

Corporate social responsibility in South African small and medium enterprises

CSR archetypal leading SMEs in the South African construction industry (SACI) toward sustainable business performance (SBP) was developed by Wentzel, et al. (2023) who collected data through a quantitative method. While ***CSR practices*** of SMEs were found to be influenced by ***CSR drivers***. Although the study affirmed this, the study has not mentioned the effect of CSR on the performance of SMEs. There is a need for investigations to be conducted on the CSR roles in the overall OP in SA SMEs, including the financial, operational, market and growth performances.

It is well known that CSR seek for a strategy for the development of a cleaner more sustainable national energy strategy. Similarly, ISO 14000 is a better-known sustainability standard than Occupational Health and Safety (OHSAS). However, the Carbon Disclosure Project concepts were least known by SMEs in the Pietermaritzburg area (Kimanzi, 2019).

In SA, literature, such as publications from: Hamann, et al. (2017), Jordaan, et al. (2018), Higgs and Hill (2019), Adonis, et al. (2019), Rooi et al. (2023), Mkhize (2024), Maome (2024) and Manchidi and Mkhize (2024) found that ***environmental and social responsibility*** were the sustainable responsible practices implemented in SMEs. A survey by Hamann, et al. (2017) revealed that the environmental responsibility of managers was the key driver of the hardly played role of state rule in regulating dispersed rural enterprises in SA. Moreover, SMEs should engage in pro-environmental behaviours in developing countries like SA.

Using a survey, Wentzel, et al. (2023) created a ***CSR*** model for SA SMEs in the construction industry. The author suggested the implementation of such a model for the achievement of sustainable business performance by those small firms. For a CSR model to reach a sustainable company performance, multiple aspects of all sustainability dimensions should be integrated into ***CSR practices***. Manchidi and Mkhize (2024) investigated the eThekwini Municipality SME owners' perceptions regarding ***CSR.*** They found that community participation, ecological awareness, and community betterment were related and suggested the building of a long-standing relationship between SMEs and communities. That was the same finding as Mkhize (2024) in his investigation of CSR roles in SMEs operating in the eThekwini Municipality. This indicates the positive link between CSR and the market performance of SMEs.

In addition to the above discussions, through interviews and focus group discussions, Maome (2024) selected manufacturing SMEs located in the eThekwini municipal area to explore the perception of the internal stakeholders regarding ***CSR.*** It was found that employees considered ***CSR*** as a feasible practice that motivated dedication and to upgrade work performance. Indeed, the improvement of employees' work performance might have a significant and positive effect on the whole OP and enable organisations to attain their goals.

In addition, for an all-inclusive performance enhancement, Maome's conclusions suggest the integration of ecological, social, and employee-related ***CSR*** projects into a business strategy.

However, the cultural and economic aspects seem to be missed. Therefore, for sustainable performance improvement, the financial and cultural sustainability perspectives need to be considered during the integration of ecological, social, and employee-related CSR projects into SMEs' strategies.

Also, Rampe (2018) adopted a quantitative approach to examine the link between the goals, activities, and practices of ***business social responsibility*** in SMMEs functioning in the Free State province. ***Business social responsibility activities*** were found to be concentrated in humanity, followed by economic and social concerns, such as upholding employee satisfaction, offering discounts to long-standing customers, combating crime in local communities, and observing business ethics. The findings suggested SMMEs' goals were shaped by what society considered legitimate norms. Economic concerns were involved in the implementation of CSR; therefore, future research should focus on the feasibility of shaping corporate economic responsibility practices suitable for SMEs.

Higgs and Hill (2019) conducted interviews, reviewed documents, and investigated waste management supply chains in SA SMEs. They found that although several SMEs responded to the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act regarding supply chain pressure and participated in ***social responsibility activities***. Most of those SMEs were not ***ecologically accountable***. Their conclusions supported the vision of SA government in job creation; SMEs' rise in the waste sector and SMEs' role in ecological accountability. The next subsection discusses tax compliance as another sustainable corporate responsibility aspect.

- **Tax compliance implementation in the organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

CR reviewed in the literature also included aspects like ***tax compliance*** (Kiringa & Jagongo, 2017; Sadress, et al., 2019; Smidec, 2017; Al-Ttaffi. 2017; Alshira'h, 2019; Alshira'h & Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Chong, et al., 2019; Inasius, 2019; Cheong, et al., 2020; Obaid, et al., 2020). In the next subsection, the adoption of tax compliance in SA SMEs is discussed.

- **Tax compliance implementation in the organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises**

In the same way as the above section, Wentzel, et al., (2023) mention ***CSR tax compliance*** (National Treasury and South African Revenue Service, 2017; Business Day, 2018; National Treasury, 2018; Ministry of Planning & International Cooperation MPIC, 2018; South African Revenue Service (SARS), 2018; Bornman & Ramutumbu, 2019; Matarirano, et al., 2019), recommended strategies to disprove factors having undesirable influences on SA SMEs' compliance behaviours. Bornman and Ramutumbu (2019) by using a mixed method approach drew a tax compliance risk profile of small guest houses and guest owners in Soweto, Tax-compliant behaviours were favoured by age, gender, and tax morale.

The effect of tax compliance costs on small business performance was predicted by Matarirano, et al. (2019) using the survival index value model (SIV®) and a quantitative research method. The analysed data revealed a significant effect of tax compliance costs on SME performance, while suggesting the undertaking of tax tasks in-house for the performance improvement of small firms. Further findings by Bornman and Ramutumbu (2019) recommended voluntary ***compliance with tax obligations*** by small business owners, taxpayer education, and enhanced communication efforts from the revenue authority.

In addition to this, risk-taking and management are discussed below.

- **Risk-taking and management implementation of organisational performance in small and medium enterprises**

Beside the above discussions, the reviewed literature counted risk amongst corporate sustainable responsibility implemented in SMEs included ***risk-taking and management*** (Rehman & Anwar, 2019; Yu, et al., 2021; Naude & Naude, 2022; Adenutsi & Whajah, 2023), ***reputation and image*** (Partanen & Goel, 2017; Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2023), and ***corporate response*** (Juergensen, et al., 2020; Morgan, et al., 2020) which make business performance of SMEs possible.

Furthermore, risk-taking and management in SA SMEs are discussed in the subsection below.

- **Risk-taking and management in the implementation of organisational performance in South African small and medium enterprises**

Similar to the above discussion about risk taking and management by SMEs in the rest of the world, the reviewed literature of SA SMEs revealed that ***risk-taking and management*** (Naude & Chiweshe, 2017; Krüger, 2021; Elizabeth, 2023), and ***risk identification and management*** (Krüger, et al., 2020) were implemented in SA SMEs. To emphasise, ***risk-taking*** was found to be the driver of product performance of SMEs in the Gauteng province (Elizabeth, 2023). Krüger (2021) explored the links between a variety of ***risk management*** components representing small companies and risk management activities. The author conducted a quantitative survey with 332 SA SMEs in the Sedibeng District Municipal Area (SDMA). In the same way, ***risk management practices*** were found to be implemented in SA SMEs as discussed below.

The degree of progression towards ***risk management practices*** was found to be in progress. In the same way, risk appetite is linked to access to liquidity, even though knowing the role of liquidity regarding behavioural finance of risk-taking remains a necessity. Similarly, Naude and Naude (2022) proposed a framework to identify and mitigate ***risks*** faced by SMEs operating in the Western Cape province. It was found that companies used ***risk management*** for their orientation estimation. ***Risk-taking*** was also found in the study below.

New product performance antecedents were examined among 225 managers and staff members of SMEs in the Gauteng province, South Africa (Elizabeth, 2023). Using a quantitative approach and survey, the author found that market orientation, ***risk taking,*** and innovative performance were the predictors of new product performance. The conclusion suggested that delegating duties to subordinates, empowerment and training of employees could improve new product performance, while teamwork, transparency and corruption eradication could improve risk-taking, whereas brainstorming, innovation, creativity, and excellence in boosting production could improve innovative performance.

Furthermore, a mixed method study by Bornman and Ramutumbu (2019) conducted among Soweto small guest house owners revealed that factors for a ***high risk of non-compliance***

included business size, social averages, knowledge shortfalls, fairness insights, perceived opportunity for non-compliance, decision frames, and the industry of this population. Mvubu and Naude's (2020) findings proposed a framework that contributes to SA SME risk management and sustainability. Nevertheless, no reviewed studies mentioned corporate response, reputation and image as the enablers of OP. Thus, investigations on the roles and impact of corporate response, reputation and image on the performance of SA SMEs may be required in the future. Furthermore, the next section involves discussions on the implementation of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) in SMEs.

4.9.8 Implementation of sustainable supply chain management in South African small and medium enterprises

This section discusses the findings of the reviewed literature on the adoption of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) in SMEs.

Kosasih, et al. (2023) incorporated ***supply chain sustainability*** into SME manufacturing businesses. However, the authors' findings recognised the absence of experiential research on the ***supply chain sustainability performance*** of SMEs operating in the manufacturing sector. In addition to this, Yang and Wang (2023) unveiled the existing links between ***SSCM*** and enterprise economic performance. The effect of ***SCM strategy*** on financial and operational performance was demonstrated by Lee (2021). Das and Hassan (2022) demonstrated the impact of ***SSCM*** and customer relationship management on OP. Similarly, Attia (2023) showed the effect of SSCM and customer relationship management on OP in the context of the Egyptian textile industry. Conversely to Yang and Wang (2023); Das and Hassan (2022), and Attia (2023), Bag, et al. (2022) have shown the effect of eco-innovation on ***green supply chain management (GSCM).***

Furthermore, ***SSCM*** was found to be implemented in many small organisations (Sánchez-Flores, et al., 2020) globally, for instance, SMEs in Poland (Kot, 2018), Chinese enterprises (Wang, et al., 2018), in Banten Province in Indonesia (Mukhsin & Suryanto, 2022), and Egypt (Attia, 2023). Furthermore, SSCM in SMEs included ***green supply chain management (GSCM)*** (Sugandini, et al., 2020; Novitasari & Agustia, 2021; Bag, et al., 2022).

The following subsection addresses the implementation of SSCM in SA SMEs.

- **Implementation of sustainable supply chain management in South African small and medium enterprises**

The findings of the implementation of various forms of sustainable supply chain management in SA SMEs are discussed in this subsection.

In SA, ***GSCM*** was also covered by the reviewed literature. The barriers and drivers to ***green manufacturing*** in South Africa were identified by Du Plooy, et al. (2022), while the impact of GSCM was demonstrated through cross-sectional evidence by Mafini and Muposhi (2017). Similarly, ***green supply chain management (GSCM) practices*** by Bag, et al. (2021). Langton, Maotoawe and Mafini (2023) revealed the influence of ***green supply chain management (GSCM)*** on the monetary performance of SA National Electrical Energy Provider. Mafini and Loury-Okoumba (2018) adopted ***GSCM activities***, which earlier, Mafini and Loury-Okoumba (2018) proved the way ***GSCM activities*** could be extended in a manufacturing evolving economy like SA.

Furthermore, the influential factors of ***GSCM*** implementation were identified by Rukuni, et al. (2022) in a study conducted in the SA cement manufacturing industry. Whereas, eco-friendly performance was positively and significantly predicted by ***GSCM dimensions*** including reverse logistics and legislation, as well as regulations (Epoh & Mafini, 2018). However, there were no links between ecological performance and ***green supply chain dimensions*** including eco-design and green purchasing (Epoh & Mafini, 2018). This indicates that ***GSCM*** does not fit the OP of SA SMEs and cannot be implemented in this industry.

Moreover, information sharing about demand strategies and predictions, as well as production schedules and delivery channels with customers and suppliers, are the necessities for the implementation of integrated schemes and ***supply chain processes*** in SA SMEs (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017). Furthermore, the next section discusses the findings of other related sustainability practices in SMEs.

4.9.9 Implementation of other related sustainability practices in South African small and medium enterprises

In this section, besides the sustainability factors implemented in OP of SMEs discussed above, other related sustainability practices implemented in SMEs are revealed in the discussion below.

Regarding other related sustainability practices implemented in SMEs one might include the following: ***organisational sustainability*** (Srisathan & Ketkaew, 2020; Srisathan, et al., 2020), commonly known as ***corporate sustainability*** (Loor-Alcívar, et al., 2020; Yang & Jang, 2020; Das, et al., 2020a, b; Duffour, 2022; Adu-Yeboah, et al., 2023) which is thoroughly connected to ***business sustainability*** (Gross-Gołacka, et al., 2020; Hernita, et al., 2021; Rakshit, et al., 2021; Hanaysha, et al,, 2022; Zaid & Sleimi, 2023) also called ***sustainable business*** (Islam, et al., 2022) which encompasses ***sustainable business performance*** (Haseeb, et al., 2019; Agrawal, et al., 2022). Other sustainable business aspects are listed below.

For instance, ***sustainable business innovation*** (Veronica, et al., 2020). ***sustainable business growth*** (Islam & Wahab, 2021), ***sustainable business models*** (Gregurec, et al., 2021) ***green business practices*** (Ashton, et al., 2017; Aghelie, 2017), ***green business strategy*** (Leonidou, et al., 2017), the ***environmentally sustainable business practices*** (Anaman, et al., 2017; Journeault, et al., 2021; Hristov, et al., 2022; Phonthanukitithaworn, et al., 2023), including ***business-driven sustainability initiatives*** (Rodriguez, et al., 2019), ***sustainable innovation initiatives*** (Dasgupta, 2023), and ***sustainable initiatives in organisational networks*** (Saunders, et., 2019). These initiatives should be taken to address and solve issues related to the overall OP and respectively, operational, financial, market and growth performances, and furthermore, they should be ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally oriented for a sustainable SMEs' performance.

The discussions above showed that the implementation of sustainability in SMEs seemed to be environmentally oriented. This might not help companies to operate in a sustainable way to become more sustainable. Thus, ***business sustainability*** or ***sustainable business*** should involve not only the environmental aspects of business but also the economic, social, and cultural features; likewise, ***sustainability assessment*** or ***sustainable valuation***. Accordingly, scholars might look at the feasibility of filling the gaps in business sustainability and

sustainability assessment aspects in the general SMEs and SA SMEs, specifically. Besides these, ***an environmental management system*** was implemented in SMEs in an environmental management system (Johnstone, 2021), while ***environmental preservation*** was fostered in manufacturing SMEs in Yemen (Al-Swidi, et al., 2024); these aspects of sustainability need to be analysed.

In addition to the above, sustainability ***analysis or assessment*** (Córdova-Aguirre & Ramón-Jerónimo, 2024), such as ***environmental sustainability analysis*** (Bakos, et al., 2020) and ***sustainable growth assessment*** (Diabate, et al., 2019) might be considered when implementing sustainability in SMEs. Yet, from the literature, none of these aspects of sustainability was found to be implemented in the SA SMEs, therefore, it requires further research.

Yadav, et al. (2018), Mahmood, et al. (2019), Bakos, et al. (2020), De Steur, et al. (2020), and Akomea, et al. (2023) proved the way ***sustainability practices*** were implemented in SMEs, while Del Giudice, et al. (2017) focused on sustainability practices enhancement. Malesios, et al. (2018) revealed the impact of sustainability practices and performance on SME economic growth. Moreover, on the one hand, Yadav et al. (2018) identified the drivers of sustainability practices, likewise De Steur, et al. (2020) discussed the drivers and assessment of sustainability practices, while, on the other hand, Aghelie (2017) identified not only the drivers but also barriers to sustainability practices.

Furthermore, the implemented sustainability practices in SMEs included: ***sustainable marketing practices*** (Lučić, 2020), ***green practice motivators*** (Rekik & Bergeron, 2017), ***green manufacturing practices*** (Omar, et al., 2024), ***green marketing strategies*** (Khan, et al., 2019; Sugandini, et al., 2020), ***sustainability green business practices*** (Aghelie, 2017) and ***financial management practices*** in Tanzania (Mang'ana, et al., 2024).

Green practices and financial practices fall within environmental and economic sustainability. Green practices, when implemented correctly, contribute to the productivity of the companies, while financial practices influence the success of financial performance in terms of establishing approaches for the proper use of cash flow and all returns, as well as the maximisation of sales and profits. Still, potential scholars need to research the feasibility of integrating and implementing cultural and social practices in SMEs.

Nevertheless, the above discussion dealt with the implementation of other related sustainability practices in SME, the following section will focus specifically on the SA context.

- **Implementation of other related sustainability practices in South African small and medium enterprises**

This subsection discusses the findings of other related sustainability practices in SA SMEs as follows: the reviewed literature showed that sustainability practices were implemented in SA SMEs, such as ***social sustainability practices*** (Masocha & Fatoki, 2018; Masocha, 2019), ***sustainability manufacturing practices*** (Fatoki, 2019), ***green marketing practices*** (Masocha, 2021), ***green practice awareness*** (Kalitanyi, 2021), and ***green marketing*** which had significant impact on three dimensions of a competitive advantage of SMEs from the Western Cape (Duffett, et al., 2018), as well as ***sustainability innovation*** (Lesakova, 2019).

Referring to the above findings, the adoption of sustainability practices, marketing and innovation leads to the achievement of the overall OP of SA SMEs. However, financial and cultural practices are essential for the attainment of sustainable SA SMEs.

The quantitative study by Lillah and Struwig (2017) analysed SME owners' attitudes towards an environmental management system and ***pro-environmental norms***, but these did not significantly influence the implementation of an ***environmental management system***.

The following section discusses the findings on the sustainability integration steps in OP of SMEs.

4.10 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 4: STEPS FOR SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATION INTO ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are connected to Table 4.15 of this chapter.

This section discusses the findings associated with the fourth **Research Objective 1a** which focused on sustainability integration steps into OP of SMEs in South Africa. This section discusses the content of Table 4.15 of this chapter. In this section, the findings answer the following fourth research question set in **Chapter 1** of this study: ***Research Question R*Q4)** *What are the steps for incorporating sustainability into OP of SMEs in South Africa?*

The following discusses answers to the above question related to the incorporation of sustainability into the OP of SMES.

Sustainability integration in SMEs was done in various ways. For instance, sustainability was incorporated into the following: fashion operations process (Karaosman, et al., 2017), likewise in the enterprises' innovation process (Wojciechowski et al., 2019), as well as management education (Hermes & Rimanoczya, 2018), further, Bratton and Pershina (2022), and Ejarque and Campos (2020) integrated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into business operations, while ***Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*** were incorporated into a cluster network model (Jiménez, et al., 2021); and a firm business model (Julin-Nyquist, et al., 2024). Moreover, through an SDG framework, Sinkovics, et al. (2022) constructively and inclusively ***incorporated ecological, social, and economic aspects*** into the worldwide business arena. In the same way, a dialectic approach integrating outcomes with ***SDGs'*** inspirational nature to guide the discourse would allow for emergence (Saxena, et al., 2021).

Ivashkiv, et al. (2020) recommended the ***incorporation of sustainable procurement*** before ***incorporating ecological accountability*** into OP. Muñoz-Torres, et al. (2018) ***integrated sustainability principles*** into the companies' supply chains and taxation, and similarly, ***sustainability elements were incorporated*** into the performance of SMEs' supply chains (Fekpe & Delaporte, 2019), whereas Journeault, et al. (2021) ***incorporated sustainable development practices*** into SMEs although ***sustainability initiatives were incorporated*** into corporate strategy and strategic decision-making (Hristov et al., 2022). Al-Shaer and Zaman (2019) discovered that ***sustainability-related targets were included*** in CEO compensation contracts.

Furthermore, various environmental aspects of sustainability were found to be integrated into the performance of SMEs. For instance, a ***sustainable environmental management system*** was integrated into company performance (Herghiligiu, et al., 2019), similarly, not only

management systems and quality management, but also ***environmental management were incorporated*** into firm performance in Turkey (Arda, et al., 2019). Moreover, ***green practices were included*** into operational performance (Santos, et al., 2019), and Abubakar, et al. (2022) strategically ***incorporated green innovation, green behaviours,*** and effects of information systems into firms' sustainable performance and competitiveness, while the ***ecological sustainability considerations*** were incorporated into a continuous improvement (CI) framework (Prashar, 2020). Furthermore, digital and ***ecological aspects were integrated*** and adjusted within SMEs through a clear strategic orientation (Ardito, et al., 2021).

Furthermore, ***ecological and social sustainability*** and ***governance practices were incorporated*** into sustainable supply chain management (Tamayo-Torres, et al., 2019). The ***circular economy (CE) concept was integrated*** into companies' sustainability agenda (Stewart & Niero, 2018). Likewise, based on semi-structured interviews (Hristov, et al., 2022) demonstrated the advantages of ***integrating sustainability initiatives*** into strategic decision-making and suggested sustainability incorporation in the company's strategy for superior performance, sustainable development, and improvement of all stakeholders' wellbeing and surrounding communities' conditions. Jiménez, et al. (2021) ***incorporated the SDG framework*** into SMEs' daily language and operations.

The introduction of environmental responsibility required a mechanism at the organisational, local and governmental levels of the agricultural enterprises (Ivashkiv, et al., 2020). Moreover, the ***incorporation of environmental responsibility*** into OP suggested the voluntary engagement in public reporting, compliance with corporate social and environmental responsibility principles, formulation of corporate green development strategy, and implementation of corporate green development strategy, as well as staff training (Ivashkiv, et al., 2020). Furthermore, the developed ***SDG framework*** enabled absolutely and inclusively the ***integration of ecological, social, and economic aspects*** into the global business field (Sinkovics, et al., 2022). Kosasih, et al. (2023) ***incorporate lean-green practices*** into manufacturing SMEs.

The discussions of the findings above, demonstrated that SMEs considered the integration of environmental sustainability components than other pillars of sustainability. The integration of financial and cultural aspects of sustainability seemed to be totally ignored. Similarly, the next

section deals with the discussions regarding the sustainability integration steps in the OP of SA SMEs.

- **Sustainability integration steps in organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises**

The reviewed literature on the sustainability integration steps in the OP of SA SMEs are discussed as follows: according to Marecha (2020), the government should entrench entrepreneurial culture through legislating entrepreneurial education at all levels of education, including SME support programmes. But, in SA the performance improvement of SMEs was led by the ***integration of the supply chain*** (Pooe & Mahlangu, 2017). ***IT was incorporated*** for the promotion of productivity and sustainability in Nigerian and SA SMEs (Ajibade & Mutula, 2021) as an environmental sustainability aspect given that IT has always been a part of the ecology. Even though not much has been revealed regarding sustainability integration into the OP of SA SMEs. Indeed, this is a call for future research.

Epoh and Mafini (2018) suggested that the ecological and overall SC performance improvement was led by the ***incorporation of GSCM practices,*** reverse logistics and adherence to legislation and regulations into the business strategy of the SMEs in SA. There are inadequate guidelines for the ***amalgamation of environmental responsibility principles*** into SME agricultural enterprises in Ukraine (Ivashkiv, et al., 2020). Therefore, it might be necessary to observe the sequential steps when incorporating sustainability into business perspectives.

The above discussions demonstrated that sustainability components need to be integrated into OP dimensions. SMEs in general should integrate sustainability not only into the operational level as they do, but they must also seek strategies for sustainability integration into the financial, market and growth performance; this applies to SA as well. However, none of the reviewed studies provided steps to be followed for the completion of such integration. Furthermore, the findings of sustainability balance approaches are discussed in the subsequent section.

4.11 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION 5: APPROACHES FOR SUSTAINABILITY BALANCE IN ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The discussions in this section are related to Table 4.15 of this chapter.

This section discusses the findings related to **Research Objective 5,** which focused on the sustainability balance approach in the OP of SMEs in South Africa. The discussions are related to Table 4.15 of this chapter. This section aimed to answer the fifth research question of this study formulated as follows: ***Research question R*Q5)** *What are the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs in South Africa?*

This section discusses the findings of the literature review on approaches to balancing sustainability pillars in SMEs as follows:

- **Sustainability balance in the organisational performance of small and medium enterprises**

The reviewed literature on sustainability balance approaches in the OP of SMEs are discussed below:

Although very few studies discussed sustainability dimensions in OP, such as Maheswari, et al. (2018). Miska, et al. (2018), Muñoz-Pascual, et al. (2019). However, only Fischer, et al. (2018) and Herrero, et al. (2024) argued the feasibility of creating such an equilibrium.

Maheswari, et al. (2018). scrutinised factorial drivers of three perspectives of the ***Triple Bottom Line Approach***, namely environmental, economic, and social Indian SMEs. Even if their findings identified strong driving forces benefiting competency and market forces, the authors did not manage to provide a way these three pillars could be balanced. Moreover, the cultural pillar of sustainability was excluded from their study. Muñoz-Pascual et al. (2019) considered three commonly known pillars of sustainability to confirm the relations and routes leading to sustainable product innovation performance in SMEs operating in Portugal. ***Ecological and social growth*** were found to be the two significant antecedents contributing to

and leading to the performance of innovative products. No equilibrium was settled between the components of sustainability.

Moreover, on the one hand, Miska et al. (2018) surveyed culture effects on ***firms' ecological, societal, economic and sustainability practices***. They found that ***corporate sustainability practices*** were negatively predicted by future and performance orientation practices. Even if the author mentioned the culture, which is the fourth sustainability dimension, the steadiness between all four pillars was not established.

On the other hand, Herrero et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative study to discuss the contradictory findings in the existing literature on the three dimensions of sustainable family companies. The findings revealed that firms balance ***ecological and economic sustainability*** in Spanish manufacturing firms in the food and beverage sector. Further, socially sustainable SMEs did not have to compromise on their economic performance. The equilibrium between ***social and environmental aspects*** was not mentioned. In other words, the simultaneous evenness between the three pillars was not acknowledged, and likewise, the existence of cultural sustainability dimensions.

On the other hand, Fischer, et al. (2018) observed that the way ***economic, environmental, and social dimensions*** were well-adjusted by entrepreneurs in their undertakings of planned ambitions. The three sustainability perspectives were found to be the priorities of sustainable business persons used in response to stakeholder interests. Moreover, sustainability dimensions, goals and balance depended on outside expectations and stakeholder participation. However, the cultural perspective of sustainability is still missing.

However, although the findings revealed sustainability aspects that were balanced in the OP of SMEs, none of the studies unveiled the steps to follow to establish such equilibrium. This should be considered in future research. Nevertheless, some steps have been suggested in Chapter 5 of this study.

The findings of sustainability balance approaches of the OP of SA SMEs are discussed below.

- **Sustainability balance approaches in organisational performance of South African small and medium enterprises**

Contrary to the above discussions, no studies on sustainability balance approaches were found in the reviewed literature on SA SMEs. This might be considered as a call for future research. Below is a summary of this chapter.

4.12 SUMMARY

This chapter presented multiple literature references collected from 2017 to 2024 from the Wits library e-resources. The library was consulted to collect literature on sustainability and the OP of SA SMEs that were online. The focus of such a collection of literature publications was to review previous studies that covered various factors (internal or external) that might enable and/ or challenge the achievement of OP and sustainability of SMEs in general and particularly in SA SMEs.

The content analysis revealed first, most of the collected literature was extracted, given that the focus was outside the objectives of the study (see Section 3.8.7). Second, there were more studies on SMEs than on SA SMEs. Moreover, regarding the enablers of challenges of OP and sustainability, the findings ranked the focus on the publications as follows: most literature focused first, on corporate factors, second, entrepreneurial factors, third, leadership factors, followed by managerial factors, then came modernity factors, after that was literature based on sustainable factors and finally business factors. The balance of the literature, included sufficient publications on sustainability implementation, followed by sustainability integration, and after that, sustainability balance.

The thematic analysis of corporate factors demonstrated that there was more literature on corporate resources, followed by corporate behaviours, then corporate practices. While literature on managerial factors concentrated mainly on management behaviours, followed by management practices and lastly other managerial aspects.

The discussions of the findings revealed what was intended to be known about the five research questions in Chapter 1. All sections addressed the discussions of the findings, listing and

describing factors explicitly related to organisational or corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity, and sustainable elements that enable and challenge the achievement of OP and sustainability in any kind of SMEs. Interpretations regarding sustainability and OP were confined to literature on SA SMEs, and the gaps in the literature were also identified for SA SMEs. The contributions of these findings are discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter links directly to Section 1.12 based on the significance of the study and Section 1.15 the chapter layout of this study, aimed to discuss the knowledge building and contributions of the study. The components of this chapter are: the knowledge building approach in Section 5.2, identification of the gaps in the literature in Section 5.3, the integrated conceptual framework board in Section 5.4, the contextual framework is presented in Section 5.5, theory building in Section 5.6, business model building in Section 5.7, methodical contributions in Section 5.8, practical and managerial implications in Section 5.9, research agenda in Section 5.10, and academic and postgraduate implications in Section 5.11. The summary of the chapter is Section 5.12. The next section discusses the construction of knowledge in this study.

5.2 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

This section provides the overall view of knowledge constructed from the literature review conducted in this study. Knowledge has become a strategic resource for organisations in managerial intelligence (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018), however, to date, the definition of knowledge has been undistinguishable and problematic (Russell 1972; Neta & Pritchard 2009). Knowledge is referred to as true belief (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), and the writing of what is known (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Moreover, knowledge consists of component constructions and interpretation (Gregor, 2006). For this purpose, this study developed six constructions with respect to categories, existing concepts, novel concepts, context, theories, and models, and their interpretation.

Dombrowski, et al. (2013) illustrated experiential knowledge; skills; and knowledge claims as the three interrelated types of knowledge with some individual features: the first one is the knowledge collected from the direct connection of own physical system with the environment and processed by the brain, second is well-structured and action-oriented knowledge that is grounded in experiential knowledge through learning and repeating a certain task performance,

and the third deals with what has been known and has been, though known. Thus, knowledge built in this study was not a simple perception (Russel, 1972), nor experiential knowledge since it was not made from the direct physical connection with the environment, but on the contrary it was made up of a collective review and a reflection (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018) of generally known information about OP, sustainability, SMEs and SA, as well as experiential knowledge through learning of sustainability and OP of SMEs in general and particularly those situated in SA. Also included are the findings of challenges and enablers, OP and sustainability achievements, steps, phases and approaches of sustainability integration, implementation and balance.

Furthermore, both unambiguous knowledge and unspoken knowledge are significant forms of knowledge (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Therefore, the study-built knowledge from the clear and understood knowledge in OP and sustainability, as a result of the integrative literature review conducted in this study. In addition to this, ideas as the medium for knowledge building, operational environments necessitate incessant expansion (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Hence, the study aimed to build knowledge in terms of five aspects including categories or themes, concepts, context, theories, and models as discussed in Sections 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8.

Bolisani and Bratianu (2018, p. 3) stated this: "*Knowledge building needs to be defined as an operational concept adequate for a business environment and not as an abstract one for a transcendental world of ideas*". More simply, it might be said that knowledge is the combination of self-reflections with other people's experiences and reflections.

Any research effort serves to build knowledge (Handfield & Melnyk, 1998). By reviewing the existing literature on OP and sustainability, novel perspectives were adopted (Jasperson, et al., 2002), such as organisational or corporate management, business, entrepreneurship, leadership, sustainability, modernity factors enabling and challenging OP and sustainability achievements, as well as sustainability integration steps, sustainability implementation phases and a balanced approach to sustainability in OP of SMEs and SA SMEs. ILR contributed substantially to the knowledge development base of sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs (Russell, 2005).

Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) stated that the real world cannot be known using minds alone which might misinform people. The reason why the innovative knowledge in this study was generated from the integrative literature review employed on sustainability and OP of South

African SMEs as conducted in this study (Webster & Watson, 2002; Callahan, 2014) on the emerging subject of sustainability and OP of SMEs and SA SMEs (Shuck, 2011). The findings of the reviewed literature were necessarily diffused in a comprehensive manner about its domain of knowledge on OP and sustainability, as well as SMEs and SA SMEs (Schryen, et al., 2015).

According to Gifford and Finkelstein (2020), a comprehensive study should develop a framework. Indeed, various frameworks have been constructed by various studies' approaches. For instance, ***categorical frameworks*** are generally developed in ***mathematics studies*** (Spivak & Kent, 2012; Giordano & Wu, 2015; Baez, et al., 2023), but in this study, it was used to exhibit various categories generated from the findings of the reviewed literature related to the research questions on sustainability and OP enablers and challenges.

Theoretical frameworks have been constructed as in typical ***quantitative research*** (Schaerer, et al., 2018; Lopez, et al., 2023). This qualitative study did not build a theoretical framework but used theories to expand old knowledge by building new ones based on the findings of this study. Generally ***qualitative studies*** develop ***conceptual frameworks*** (Engler, et al., 2018; Majid & Gagliardi, 2019; Guntur, 2019; Khoa & Hung, 2023), likewise, so do management studies (Peachey, et al., 2015; Ayentimi, et al., 2018; Clayton, et al., 2023; Koo, et al., 2023). This study indeed developed a conceptual framework generated from the findings related to the research questions about sustainability implementation, integration, and balance. Quantitative and/or qualitative studies can build ***business models*** (Battistella, et al., 2018; Groot, et al., 2019; Broccardo, et al., 2023). Business models built in this study were developed from the combination of the identified gaps in the literature, the categorical-conceptual framework, the contextual framework, and the theory built.

Liberati et al. (2009, p. 343) detailed that the existing state of knowledge has its limitations and stated this: "*Information about the effects of several different interventions may be available that helps readers understand why potential relative benefits or harms of particular interventions need review.*" According to Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) coherent reasoning grounded in adages is the possible foundation of knowledge. Keeping this statement in mind, the knowledge built in this study was grounded on the advantages and limitations generated from the reviewed literature.

Multiple types of knowledge can be generated from a ILR (Guba & Lincoln 1994) and built cumulatively (Jasperson et al., 2002), in applying each lens separately for the description of the evolving patterns (Schryen et al., 2015), and then summarised to facilitate both academics and practitioners to access the current information and key inputs of the study (Frade, et al., 2021). Therefore, in this study, knowledge was generated from the reviewed literature, built cumulatively through the identification of categories and their relative applicable theories, followed by the identified concepts and context, which allowed the development of a new model and concepts. Certainly, these were the six core inputs to knowledge building of this study. Furthermore, the constructed knowledge was summarised through designed figures for better understanding. The advanced knowledge was decisively founded from the well-conducted integrative literature review on sustainability and OP of SA SMEs (Snyder, 2019). However, attention has never been paid by researchers when it comes to building categorical frameworks in qualitative and management studies. Thus, this study took the opportunity to use such an outline.

The ILR conducted in this study allowed for the development of an innovative conceptual perspective generated by existing research (Ray & Zarestky, 2021). This study was qualitative and the reason why there was no need to build a theoretical framework. Hence, this integrative literature review successfully conducted in this study contributed to the development of two novel conceptual frameworks (MacInnis, 2011) and three business models. The first design was labelled an integrated categorical-conceptual framework, the second, a conceptual framework, the third was theories development, the fourth, a business model for successful SME performance, the fifth, a business model of successful SMEs' sustainability and the six one, the business model for sustainable SMEs' performance. These frameworks and models were developed based on the factors and concepts found in the reviewed literature. The subsequent section presents the identified gaps in the literature reviewed on SA SMEs.

5.3 IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS IN THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This section summarises the gaps identified in the reviewed literature, which require the attention and consideration of academics, postgraduate students, and practitioners for their future research. As mentioned in Chapter 3, to observe the principle of any literature review starts from the broad to the context under study. Thus, the conducted literature review

integrated studies on SMEs in general and SA SMEs in particular. This principle was demonstrated in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 4, Sections 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9. 4.10 and 4.11.

To simplify the understanding of the gaps, some figures were designed in this section which enumerated various aspects found in the literature that were covered by SMEs in the rest of the world, followed by those that were covered by the literature on SA SMEs, and thereafter, the aspects that were not covered by SA SMEs studies were also listed. The identification of gaps was done in comparison to the findings of other reviewed literature on SMEs that were not conducted in SA. Hence, the gaps were identified only for SA SME literature as mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.14. Figures were used to clarify the gaps and provide an opportunity for future investigations. The next section outlines the gaps identified in the findings related to the literature on organisational or corporate factors.

5.3.1 Gaps in the literature related to organisational or corporate factors of South African South African small and medium enterprises

This section uses tables to display multiple gaps identified in the literature on corporate factors in SA SMEs only, which include the gaps in ***corporate resources, corporate behaviours, corporate capabilities, and corporate networking***. Hence, Table 5.1 below presents the identified gaps in the literature on corporate resources.

Table 5.1: Gaps in organisational or corporate resources aspects in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Corporate resource aspects covered by broad SME literature	Corporate resource aspects covered by SA SME literature	Corporate resource aspects not covered by SA SME literature
Financial resources -Working capital -Capital structure -Tax structure -Financial capital **Physical resources** -Leveraging resources	**Financial resources** -Financial capital **Physical resources** -Logistics **Human resources** - Human capital	**Financial resources** -Working capital -Capital structure -Tax structure **Physical resources** -Leveraging resources -Alter resources

-Logistics outsourcing -Alter resources **Human resources** -Social capital -Human capital -HR practices -HR outsourcing **Other resources** -Intellectual capital -Awareness -Skills -Talent management -Knowledge -Perception	**Other resources** -Awareness -Skills -Knowledge -Organisational culture	**Human resources** -Social capital -HR practices -HR outsourcing **Other resources** -Perception -Intellectual capital -Talent management

Source: Author's own

Figure 5.1 shows that even though corporate resource factors have been covered by literature on SA SMEs, there still remains much to be explored by researchers in the future. The next table presents the gaps in the corporate behaviour literature covering SA SMEs.

Table 5.2: Gaps in organisational or corporate behaviours aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Corporate behaviour aspects covered by broad SME literature	**Corporate behaviour aspects covered by SA SME literature**	**Corporate behaviour aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Corporate attitude -Corporate agility -Organisational ambidexterity -Corporate engagement -Corporate commitment	-Organisational agility -Corporate commitment -Corporate engagement	-Corporate attitude -Organisational ambidexterity

Source: Author's own

Figure 5.2 shows that literature on corporate behaviours in the context of SA SMEs are still insufficient and call for further investigations by potential researchers. In Table 5.2 one can see the missing parts of corporate behaviours in the SA context, which include corporate attitude, organisational ambidexterity and corporate engagement that need scholars and postgraduate students' attention. However, corporate capability gaps in the SA SME literature were identified in the following table.

Table 5.3: Gaps in organisational or corporate capabilities aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Corporate capabilities aspects covered by broad SME literature	**Corporate capabilities aspects covered by SA SME literature**	**Corporate capabilities aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Relationship capabilities -Dynamic capability -Market capability -Technological capability -Entrepreneurial capability -Network-related-capabilities -Management capabilities -Absorptive capacity -Digital platform capability -Dynamic marketing capabilities -IT capabilities -Competitive capability -Customer involvement capability -Involvement capabilities -Pricing capability -Operational capability -International capabilities -Alliance management capability -Capacity building	-Dynamic capabilities -Absorptive capacity -Adaptive capacity -Strategic stance -Collaborative planning capabilities -Supply chain capabilities -Innovative capacity -Risk management capabilities -Lagging capabilities	-Relationship capabilities -Market capability -Technological capability -Entrepreneurial capability -Management capabilities -Digital platform capability -Dynamic marketing capabilities -IT capabilities -Competitive capability -Customer involvement capability -Involvement capabilities -Pricing capability -Operational capability -International capabilities -Alliance management capability -Capability maturity model -Market knowledge capability -Top management capabilities

-Logistics capability -Capability maturity model -Market knowledge capability -Top management capabilities -Knowledge sharing capabilities -Customer involvement capability -Customer bonding capability -Knowledge management capabilities -Innovation capabilities -Network partners' capabilities		-Knowledge sharing capabilities -Customer involvement capability -Customer bonding capability -Knowledge management capabilities -Network partners' capabilities

Source: Author's own

Table 5.3 above compares the findings of corporate capabilities aspects in the generic SME literature and literature focusing on SA SME studies. The table shows what has not been covered by SA SMEs in the literature. This may be a call for potential future research. However, the next section provides a discussion on the gaps in corporate networking literature.

Table 5.4: Gaps in organisational or corporate networking aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Corporate networks aspects covered by broad SME literature	**Corporate networks aspects covered by SA SME literature**	**Corporate networks aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Internationalisation -Inter-organisational networks -International networking -International new ventures' (INVs) networking -Inter-organisational collaboration -Network resources	-Retailers in collaborative relationships -Supply chain partnership collaboration -Collaboration integration -Integration relationship commitment -Longstanding associations	-Internationalisation -Inter-organisational networks -International networking -International new venture (INVs) networking -Inter-organisational collaboration -Network resources

-Cross-border e-commerce -International e-commerce -Foreign business relationships -Regional integration -Collaboration with the firm's stakeholders -Network partners -Network embeddedness -Network diffusion -Horizontal and vertical connectedness -Alliance management -Network competence -Entrepreneurial network -Corporate network -Social networks	-Buyer-supplier engagement, -Buyer-supplier commitment, -Buyer-supplier communication, -Buyer-supplier cooperation, -Strategic networks -Logistics integration Supplier partnering, -Engagement in collaborative and strategic partnerships -Collaborative innovation -Networking activities	-Cross-border e-commerce -International e-commerce -Foreign business relationships -Regional integration -Network partners -Network embeddedness -Network diffusion -Horizontal and vertical connectedness -Alliance management -Network competence -Entrepreneurial network -Corporate network -Social networks

Source: Author's own

The above table shows the extent of literature covered on corporate networking of SMEs in general and SA SMEs in particular. Although there were a good number of studies on this aspect, however, it was observed that much is still to be done. This might be considered according to the above table, although several studies on SMEs have covered corporate networking in the SA context, however, there is still much to be done. This may be a call for scholars to conduct research. The above table disclosed that although literature on corporate networks in SA has been sufficiently covered, there is a need to also explore other aspects of networking of SA SMEs in the future.

Table 5.5: Gaps in other innovation and organisational learning aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Innovation and organisational learning aspects covered by broad SME literature	**Innovation and organisational learning aspects covered by SA SME literature**	**Innovation and organisational learning aspects not covered by SA SME literature**

- Innovation -Creativity -Employee creativity -Employee innovation -Innovation model -Innovation strategy -Marketing innovation -Entrepreneurial innovativeness -Financial innovation -Innovation dimensions -Innovation activity -Open innovation -Innovation adoption -Innovation culture -Innovation enhancement -Innovation performance -Organisational learning -Training -Exploration and exploitation of opportunities	-Innovation -Innovation capacity -Innovative performance -Open innovation -Open innovation initiatives -Innovation output -Marketing innovation -Collaborative innovation -Organisational learning	-Creativity -Employee creativity -Employee innovation -Innovation model -Innovation strategy -Entrepreneurial innovativeness -Financial innovation -Innovation dimensions -Innovation activity -Innovation adoption -Innovation culture -Innovation enhancement -Exploration and exploitation of opportunities

Source: Author's own

Table 5.5 exhibited the gap of innovation and organisational learning aspects in the literature covering SA SMEs. When compared with the generic SMEs, there is more research to be done for SA research publications. The subsequent section provides a gap in the literature on managerial aspects.

5.3.2 Gaps in the literature related to management factors of South African small and medium enterprises

The use of tables in this section presents the identified gaps in the literature related to managerial factors in SA SMEs only. These gaps included aspects related to ***management behaviours***, ***planning and strategy, supply chain management and total quality management, marketing and human resource management, accounting, and management accounting, as***

well as other management aspects. Hence, the table below offers the identification of gaps in the literature.

Table 5.6: Gaps in management behaviours aspects in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Management behaviour aspects covered in SME literature	Management behaviour aspects covered in SA SME literature	Management behaviour aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Management support -Managerial competencies -Management personality -Managerial capacity -Managerial external capabilities -Managerial innovation capacity -Top management's commitment	-Managerial competencies -Trust and commitment -Managers' environmental responsibility -Strategic management	-Management support -Management personality -Managerial capacity -Managerial external capabilities -Managerial innovation capacity -Top management's commitment

Source: Author's own

Table 5.6 above exhibits the managerial behaviours covered by SMEs, SA SMEs and those not covered by SA SMEs as the gaps in the reviewed literature. The following section presents the gaps in planning and strategy literature.

Figure 5.7: Gaps in planning and strategy aspects in the reviewed literature of SA SME

Planning and strategy aspects covered in SME literature	Planning and strategy aspects covered in SA SME literature	Planning and aspects strategy not covered by SA SME literature
-Planning -Strategy -Strategic actions	-Planning -Collaborative planning -Strategy	-Strategic actions -Strategic initiatives -Sustainable corporate strategy

-Strategic initiatives -Sustainable corporate strategy -Competitive strategies -Market-driven strategies	-Lockdown survival strategies -Strategies of global recession -Competitive strategies -Resilient strategies -Marketing strategy	-Market-driven strategies

Source: Author's own

Table 5.7 above shows that strategy and planning have been well covered by SA SME literature, however, there are still some aspects that need to be covered by academics in the future. The next table presents the identification of literature on supply chain management in SA SMEs.

Figure 5.8: Gaps in supply chain management and total quality management aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Supply chain management and total quality management aspects covered in SME literature	**Supply chain management and total quality management aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Supply chain management and total quality management aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Supply chain management -SCM practices -SCM strategy -Quality management stages -Quality management -TQM -TQM adoption -TQM practices -TQM model -TQM tools	-Supply chain management -SC integration -Supply development -SC partnership -SC resilience strategies -SC collaboration -Individual supply chains -Quality service	-SCM practices -SCM strategy -Quality management stages -Quality management -TQM -TQM adoption -TQM practices -TQM model -TQM tools

Source: Author's own

According to Table 5.8 above, literature on SCM in SA SMEs has been sufficiently covered in comparison to the generic SMEs. However, so far, nothing has been done regarding research on TQM in the OP of SA SMEs. Therefore, the identified gaps need to be considered in the

investigations. Table 5.9 below presents the gaps in the literature on marketing and HRM aspects in SA SMEs.

Figure 5.9: Gaps in marketing and human resource management aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Marketing and human resource management aspects covered in SME literature	**Marketing and human resource management aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Marketing and human resource management aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Marketing -Marketing capabilities -Marketing performance -Marketing practices -HRM -Green HRM	- Marketing practices -Experiential marketing -Marketing strategies -Place marketing -HRM -Human capital management -HRM practices -Capital investments -HRM strategies -Human capital management	-Marketing capabilities -Marketing performance -Green HRM

Source: Author's own

Table 5.9 above, even if marketing and HRM have been covered by literature on SA SMEs, there still remains some work to be done by researchers in the future. The next table presents the gaps in the literature on accounting and management accounting aspects covering SA SMEs.

Table 5.10: Gaps in accounting and management accounting aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Accounting and management accounting aspects covered in SME literature	**Accounting and management accounting aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Accounting and management accounting aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
- Accounting information systems -Accounting information -Activity- based Costing -Cash flow	- Financial management -Cost efficiency -Sourcing accounting services	- Accounting information systems -Cash flow - Management of economic capitals

- Management of economic capitals -Management of financial resources -MAC -Management accounting innovation capability -MAC practices -MAC use -Strategic MAC -MAC information -MAC system -MAC services -MAC methods -Environnemental MAC	Activity-based costing implementation - MAC -MAC practices -Environmental management accounting practices	-Management of financial resources - MAC information -MAC innovation capability -Strategic MAC -MAC system -MAC services -MAC methods

Source: Author's own

Table5.10 above shows some aspects of accounting and management accounting that were covered by previous studies on SA SMEs. Yet, much needs to be done in future. Furthermore, the next table exhibits the gaps in other management aspects in SA SME literature.

Table 5.11: Gaps in other management aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Other management aspects covered in SME literature	**Marketing and human resource management aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Marketing and human resource management aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Managerial practices -Management control systems -Managerial relationships -Management orientation -Strategic management -Management innovation -Managerial innovation -Investment -Compensation -Decision making	- Managerial practices -Management practices -Management systems -Employment relationships and work engagement -Diversity management practices -Compliance or management -Incubator management -Compensation -Strategic decision-making	-Management control systems -Managerial relationships -Management orientation -Strategic management

	-Management innovation -Strategic management -Managerial structures	

Source: Author's own

Table 5.11 above demonstrates the extent to which other management aspects have been covered by literature in SA SMEs, even though the identified gaps were also provided. However, business aspects gaps were identified in the following section.

5.3.3 Gaps in the literature related to business aspects of South African SMEs

The current section presents the identified gaps in the reviewed literature on business factors and SA SMEs. The gaps covered ***business diversification, business models business ethics and practices***, as well as ***business intelligence*** aspects. Table 5.12 highlights the gaps of business aspects in SA SMEs.

Table 5.12: Gap in business diversification aspects in South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Business diversification aspects covered in SME literature	**Business diversification aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Business diversification aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Business diversification -Geographic diversification -Product diversification -Innovation diversity -Financing diversification -Gender diversity -Management team diversity -Entrepreneur's experiential diversity	-Business diversification	-Geographic diversification -Product diversification -Innovation diversity -Financing diversification -Gender diversity -Management team diversity -Entrepreneur's experiential diversity

Source: Author's own

Table 5.12 displays the almost non-existence of literature on business diversity in SA SMEs, highlighting the gaps for future research.

Table 5.13: Gaps in business models in the SA SME reviewed literature

Business models covered in SME literature	**Business models covered in SA SME literature**	**Business models not covered by SA SME literature**
-Business model -Green business model -International business models -Ambidextrous business model -Business model innovation	(No literature)	-Business model -Green business model -International business models -Ambidextrous business model -Business model innovation

Source: Author's own

Table 5.13 above demonstrates that there was no literature on business models in SA SMEs and should be considered for future research. Table 5.14 below shows the gaps in business ethics and practices in SA SME literature.

Table 5.14: Gaps in business ethics and practices aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Business ethics and practices aspects covered in SME literature	**Business ethics and practices aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Business ethics and practices aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Business ethics -Ethical practices -Business practices -Green business practices -Business advice -Business advisors	-Business practices -Business ethics	-Ethical practices -Green business practices -Business advice -Business advisors

Source: Author's own

Table 5.14 shows that there exist some business ethics and practices aspects covered by the literature focusing on SA SMEs. Table 5.15 identifies the business intelligence aspects in the SA SME literature.

Table 5.15: Gaps in business intelligence aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Business intelligence aspects covered in SME literature	**Business intelligence aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Business intelligence aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Business orientation -Business strategy -Green business strategy -Business incubation -Business incubation process -Business incubators influences -Business incubators role -Business management -Business process management -Business success -Business owners -Business owners' success -Business planning -Business intelligence	-Business process management -Business intelligence -Business success -Business planning	-Business orientation -Business strategy -Green business strategy -Business owners' success -Business incubation -Business incubation process -Business incubators influences -Business incubators role -Business management

Source: Authors owns

Table 5.15 displays literature on business intelligence in the context of SA SMEs is still insufficient and calls for further research by scholars and post-graduate students. However, gaps in entrepreneurial factors in SA SME literature are identified in the section below.

5.3.4 Gaps in the literature related to entrepreneurial factors of South African SMEs

This section offers the acknowledged gaps in the reviewed literature on entrepreneurial factors related to SA SMEs. These include ***entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial behaviours***

and ***entrepreneurial education***. Hence, Table 5.16 below displays the gaps in entrepreneurial orientation aspects.

Table 5.16: Gaps in entrepreneurial orientation aspects in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Entrepreneurial orientation aspects covered in SME literature	**Entrepreneurial orientation aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Entrepreneurial orientation aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Entrepreneurial orientation -International entrepreneurial orientation -Green entrepreneurial orientation -Market orientation -Strategic orientation -Innovation orientation -Learning orientation -Stakeholder orientation -Competitor orientation -Environmental sustainability orientation	-Risk-oriented entrepreneurial orientation -Entrepreneurial orientation -Market orientation	-International entrepreneurial orientation -Green entrepreneurial orientation -Strategic orientation -Innovation orientation -Learning orientation -Stakeholder orientation -Competitor orientation -Environmental sustainability orientation

Source: Author's own

The above table demonstrates that compared to other SME-related studies on entrepreneurial orientation, it may be said that the SA research focus may still have a long way to go, requiring the attention of academics and scholars. Gaps in the literature related to entrepreneurial behaviours of SA SMEs were identified in table 5.17 below.

Table 5.17: Gaps in entrepreneurial behaviours aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Entrepreneurial behaviours aspects covered in SME literature	Entrepreneurial behaviours aspects covered in SA SME literature	Entrepreneurial behaviours aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Entrepreneurial behaviours -Strategic entrepreneurship behaviours -Innovative behaviours -Entrepreneurs' improvisational behaviours -Enterprises' employee training behaviours -Export behaviours -Financial behaviours -Planned behaviours -Entrepreneurial competencies -Entrepreneurial resilience	-Planned behaviours -Entrepreneurial competencies -Entrepreneurial resilience	-Entrepreneurial behaviours -Strategic entrepreneurship behaviours -Innovative behaviours -Entrepreneurs' improvisational behaviours -Enterprises' employee training behaviours -Export behaviours -Financial behaviours

Source: Author's own

Similar to the previous table on the gaps in entrepreneurial orientation in SA SME literature, Table 5.17 on entrepreneurial behaviours aspects (above) illustrates the inadequacy of existing studies in the SA SME context. This is considered a call for further research.

Table 5.18: Gaps in entrepreneurial education aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Entrepreneurial education aspects covered in SME literature	Entrepreneurial education aspects covered in SA SME literature	Entrepreneurial education aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Support programme -Edu-finance -Entrepreneurial literacy -Technological literacy	-Financial literacy -Entrepreneurial education	-Support programme -Edu-finance -Entrepreneurial literacy -Technological literacy

-Digital literacy -Information literacy competencies -E-literacy -Financial literacy -Entrepreneurial learning -Entrepreneurship training		-Digital literacy -Information literacy competencies -E-literacy -Entrepreneurial learning -Entrepreneurship training

Source: Author's own

When looking at Figure 5.18 in comparison with the two previous figures on the entrepreneurial factors and gaps in the reviewed literature on the SA context, it seems that all entrepreneurial factors, including the entrepreneurial education factor have been covered insufficiently, and again this requires particular attention for future research.

5.3.5 Gaps in the literature related to leadership factors of South African SMEs

In this section, the gaps were identified in the literature covering entrepreneurial subjects associated with SMEs in SA. There was a greater focus in the literature on leadership styles than leadership aspects, as demonstrated in Table 5.19 below.

Table 5.19: Gaps in leadership aspects and styles in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Leadership aspects covered in SME literature	**Leadership aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Leadership aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Leadership performance -Entrepreneurial leadership -Distributed or shared leadership -Relational leadership -Democratic leadership -E-Leadership -Ambidextrous leadership -Digital leadership	-Innovative leadership -Entrepreneurial leadership -Strategic leadership -Ethical leadership -Transformational leadership or -Transformative style	-Leadership performance -Distributed or shared leadership -Relational leadership -Democratic leadership -E-Leadership -Ambidextrous leadership -Digital leadership

-Key leadership determinants -Sustainable leadership -Ethical leadership -Innovation or innovative leadership -Strategic leadership -Strategic leaders -Transactional leadership -Transformative leadership -Transformational leadership -Leadership commitment		-Key leadership determinants -Sustainable leadership -Transactional leadership -Strategic leaders -Leadership commitment

Source: Author's own

Table 5.19 illustrates the literature on leadership styles in SA SMEs is still insufficient and requires further investigations by potential researchers. The gaps of modernity factors in SA SME literature are discussed in the following section.

5.3.6 Gaps in the literature related to modernity factors of South African SMEs

This section identifies the gaps in the literature on modernism covering SA SMEs compared to other SMEs. The gaps include ***technology, internet, digitalisation,*** and ***social media***. Table 5.20 below presents the gaps in technology-related literature.

Table 5.20: Gaps in technology aspects in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Technology aspects covered in SME literature	Technology aspects covered in SA SME literature	Technology aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Technology -New technology -Information technology (IT) -Information Communication and Technology (ICT) -Technological change	-Technology -New technology -Information technology (IT) -Information Communication and Technology (ICT) -Industry 4.0 technologies or	-Technological change -Technology adoption -Technology adoption capabilities -Technological innovation. -Cutting-edge Technologies

-Technology adoption technology adoption capabilities -Technological innovation. -Cutting-edge Technologies -State-of-the-Art technologies -Cloud computing Technology -Big data analytics -Big data analytics management -Blockchain technology	Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)	-State-of-the-Art Technologies -Cloud computing Technology -Big data analytics -Big data analytics management -Blockchain technology

Source: Author's own

Table 5.20 shows literature on technology in the context of SA SMEs is still insufficient. Thus, future research is required. However, the gaps in the internet-related aspects in SA SME literature are identified in the following table.

Table 5.21: Gaps in internet aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Internet aspects covered in SME literature	**Internet aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Internet aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-E-commerce -International e-commerce -E-commerce -E-business -E-business -E-business innovation -E-business technologies -E-business strategy -E-logistics -E-marketing -E-procurement	-E-procurement -E-design -E-negotiation	-E-commerce -International e-commerce -E-commerce -E-business -E-business -E-business innovation -E-business technologies -E-business strategy -E-logistics -E-marketing

Source: Author's own

Table 5.21 illustrates that the existing literature on the internet in the context of SA SMEs remains insufficient, underscoring the need for further investigation by potential researchers. However, the gaps in the SA SME literature are identified in the subsequent table.

Table 5.22: Gaps in digitalisation aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Digitalisation aspects covered in SME literature	**Digitalisation aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Digitalisation aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Digitalisation -Digital transformation -Digital facilitators -Digital adoption -Digital technologies -Digital information -Digital platform -Digital wave -Digital development -Digital business -Digital business management -Digital transformation -Digital media	-Digitalisation -Digital technology	-Digital transformation -Digital facilitators -Digital adoption -Digital information -Digital platform -Digital wave -Digital development -Digital business -Digital business management -Digital transformation -Digital media

Source: Author's own

Table 5.22 displays the available literature on digitalisation in the context of SA SMEs. It is still insufficient and calls for further investigation by postgraduate students and academics. Social media gaps in SA SME literature are identified in the next table.

Table 5.23: Gaps in social media aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Social media aspects covered in SME literature	Social media aspects covered in SA SME literature	Social media aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Social media -Social media engagement -Social media adoption -Social media use -Social media marketing -Social media tools -Social media platforms -Facebook and WhatsApp groups	-Social media technologies -Social media marketing -Social media business tools -Social media platforms	-Social media engagement -Social media adoption -Social media use -Facebook and WhatsApp groups

Source: Author's own

Table 5.23 illustrates that the literature on social media in the context of SA SMEs is well-covered, yet further investigation is still needed. The gaps in sustainable factors in SA SME literature are identified in the following section.

5.3.7 Gaps in the literature of sustainable-related aspects of South African SMEs

This section illustrates a range of gaps identified in the literature of sustainable-related aspects in SA SMEs; these gaps are highlighted in table 5.24 below.

Table 5.24: Gaps in sustainable-related aspects in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Sustainable-related aspects covered in SME literature	Sustainable-related aspects covered in SA SME literature	Sustainable-related aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Sustainability	-Sustainability	-Sustainability capabilities

-Sustainability capabilities -Sustainability innovation -Sustainability practices -Sustainability performance -Sustainable performance -Environmental sustainability performance -Financial performance -Social performance -Sustainable competitive advantage -Green competitive advantage -Green financial management -Environmental management process -Environmental sustainability -Environmental initiatives -Social sustainability -Corporate social responsibility -Environmental and social governance -Turbulent environment -Sustainability orientation -Sustainability dynamism -Organisational sustainability -Corporate responsibility -Environmental sustainability risk	-Environmental sustainability -Corporate responsibility -Risk -Corporate social responsibility -Environmental and social governance	-Sustainability innovation -Sustainability practices -Sustainability performance -Sustainable performance -Environmental sustainability performance -Financial performance -Social performance -Sustainable competitive advantage -Green competitive advantage -Green financial management -Environmental management process-Environmental initiatives -Social sustainability -Turbulent environment -Sustainability orientation -Sustainability dynamism -Organisational sustainability -Corporate responsibility -Environmental sustainability risk

Source: Author's own

Table 5.24 illustrates that the literature on sustainable aspects in the context of SA SMEs is still insufficient and necessitates further research. However, gaps in sustainability implementation in SA SME literature are identified in the next section.

5.3.8 Gaps in the literature related to the sustainability implementation phases of South African SMEs

This section illustrates the range of gaps identified in the aspects of sustainability implementation revealed by the reviewed literature. The gaps were identified in line with the implementation of ***SD, SDGS, organisational change, circular economy, lean management, sustainable corporate governance, sustainable corporate responsibility, sustainable supply chain management,*** and ***other sustainability practices*** in SA SMEs. The table below presents the gaps in the SD.

Table 5.25: Gaps in sustainable development implementation aspects in the South African small and medium enterprises reviewed literature

Sustainable development implementation aspects covered in SME literature	**Sustainable development aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Sustainable development aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Sustainability concepts -Sustainable development -Sustainable development practices -Sustainable development analysis -Corporate sustainable development enhancement -Economic development	-Sustainable development practices -Sustainable development 3 pillars	-Sustainability concepts -Sustainable development -Sustainable development practices -Sustainable development analysis -Corporate sustainable development enhancement -Economic development

Source: Author's own

Table 5.25 shows that literature on SD in the context of SA SMEs is insufficient and requires further investigation. Similarly, the gaps in the SDG aspects in the SA SME literature are identified in the following table.

Table 5.26: Gaps in sustainable development goals implementation aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

SDGs aspects implementation covered in SME literature	SDGs aspects implementation covered in SA SME literature	SDGs aspects implementation not covered in SA SME literature
-2030 agenda sustainable -Development goals (SDG) -SDGs framework	(No literature)	-2030 agenda sustainable -Development goals (SDG) -SDGs framework

Source: Author's own

Table 5.26 illustrates the lack of literature on SDGs in the context of SA SMEs and calls for further investigations by potential researchers. However, the gaps in organisational change implementation in SA SME literature are identified in the next table.

Table 5.27: Gaps in organisational change and circular economy aspects in the SA SMEs reviewed literature

Sustainability implementation aspects covered in SME literature	Sustainability implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature	Sustainability implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Organisational change -Business model changes -Organisational change management -Business model adaptations	-Change in management leadership	-Organisational change -Business model changes -Organisational change management -Business model adaptations

Source: Author's own

Table 5.27 illustrates that the literature on organisational change in the context of SA SMEs is still insufficient and calls for further investigation by postgraduate students and academics. However, circular economy gaps in SA SME literature are identified in the following table.

Table 5.28: Gaps in circular economy aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Circular economy (CE) implementation aspects covered in SME literature	Circular economy (CE) implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature	Circular economy (CE) implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-CE adoption -CE implementation	-Circular economy	-CE adoption -CE implementation

Source: Author's own

Table 5.28 displays that the literature on the circular economy in the context of SA SMEs need further research. However, lean management gaps in SA SME literature are identified in the table below.

Table 5.29: Gaps in lean management aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Lean management aspects implementation covered in SME literature	Lean management aspects implementation covered in SA SME literature	Lean management aspects implementation not covered by SA SME literature
-Lean management (LM) -Lean practices -Lean management practices -Social lean practices -Technical lean practices -Social lean management -Technical lean management -Lean dynamic performance management systems -Lean–green performance -Lean manufacturing -Lean strategies implementation	(No literature)	-Lean management (LM) -Lean practices -Lean management practices -Social lean practices -Technical lean practices -Social lean management -Technical lean management -Lean dynamic performance management systems -Lean–green performance -Lean manufacturing -Lean strategies implementation

-Lean-excellence business management -Lean principles		-Lean-excellence business management -Lean principles

Source: Author's own

Table 5.29 illustrates the lack of literature on lean management in the context of SA SMEs. This calls for further investigation by researchers. However, sustainable corporate governance gaps in SA SME literature are identified in the following table.

Table 5.30: Gaps in sustainable corporate governance aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Sustainable corporate governance implementation aspects covered in SME literature	**Sustainable corporate governance implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Sustainable corporate governance implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Sustainable corporate governance (SCG) -Sustainability principles -Sustainable corporate governance -Stakeholder-oriented corporate governance -Green corporate governance -Environmental, social and governance (ESG) -Environmental, social and governance (ESG)practices	(No literature)	-Sustainable corporate governance (SCG) -Sustainability principles -Sustainable corporate governance -Stakeholder-oriented corporate governance -Green corporate governance -Environmental, social and governance (ESG) -Environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices

Source: Author's own

Table 5.30 illustrates the absence of literature on sustainable corporate governance implementation aspects in SA SMEs and stresses the gaps for future research. However, corporate sustainable responsibility gaps in SA SMEs literature are identified in the subsequent table.

Table 5.31: Gaps in sustainable corporate responsibility aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Sustainable corporate responsibility implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature	**Sustainable corporate responsibility implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Sustainable corporate responsibility implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Corporate sustainable responsibility -Social responsibility -Corporate social responsibility -Corporate social responsibility initiatives -Small business social responsibility -Socially responsible supplier development -Stakeholder corporate social responsibility -Sustainable social responsibility -Environmental corporate social responsibility -Accountability mechanisms -Tax compliance	-Corporate social responsibility -Tax compliance -Risk taking -Risk management -Risk identification -Risk management -Social responsibility -Environmental responsibility - Corporate social responsibility model - Corporate social responsibility roles - Corporate social responsibility projects -Business social responsibility -Social responsibility activities	-Corporate social responsibility initiatives -Small business social responsibility -Socially responsible supplier development -Stakeholder corporate social responsibility -Sustainable social responsibility -Environmental corporate social responsibility -Accountability mechanisms -Reputation and image -Corporate response

-Risk taking -Risk management -Reputation and image -Corporate response		

Source: Author's own

Table 5.31 illustrates that the literature on corporate sustainable responsibility in the context of SA SMEs and the required aspects that need further investigation. However, the gaps in sustainable supply chain management aspects in SA SME literature are identified in the following table.

Table 5.32: Gaps in sustainable supply chain management aspects in the SA SME reviewed literature

Sustainable supply chain management implementation aspects covered in SME literature	**Sustainable supply chain management implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature**	**Sustainable supply chain management implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature**
-Sustainable supply chain management (SMCM) -Supply chain sustainability -Green supply chain management -Supply chain management strategy	--Green supply chain management -Green manufacturing -Green supply chain management impact -Green supply chain management activities -Green supply chain management implementation	-Sustainable supply chain management (SMCM) -Supply chain sustainability

Source: Author's own

Table 5.32 illustrates that literature on sustainable supply chain management in the context of SA SMEs, including the required aspects for future research. However, the gaps in other sustainability practices in SA SME literature are identified in the next table.

Table 5.33 Gaps in other sustainability practices implementation aspects (1) in the SA SME reviewed literature

(1) Other sustainability practices implementation aspects covered in SME literature	Other sustainability practices implementation aspects covered in SA SME literature	Implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Organisational sustainability -Corporate sustainability -Business sustainability -Sustainable business -Sustainable business performance -Sustainable business innovation -Sustainable business growth -Sustainable business models -Green business practices -Green business strategy -Environmentally sustainable business practices	- Social sustainability practices -Sustainability manufacturing practices -Green practices awareness	-Organisational sustainability -Corporate sustainability -Business sustainability -Sustainable business -Sustainable business performance -Sustainable business innovation -Sustainable business growth -Sustainable business models -Green business practices -Green business strategy -Environmentally sustainable business practices

Source: Author's own

Table 5.33 illustrates that the literature on other sustainability practices in the context of SA SMEs is still insufficient and require further investigation. Similarly, the gaps of more sustainability practices aspects in SA SME literature are identified in the subsequent table.

Table 5.34: Gaps in other sustainability practices implementation aspects (2) in the SA SME reviewed literature

(2) Other sustainability practices implementation	**Other sustainability practices implementation**	**Implementation aspects not covered by SA SME literature**

aspects covered in SME literature	aspects covered in SA SME literature	
-Sustainability initiatives -Business-driven -Sustainable innovation initiatives -Sustainable initiatives in organisational networks -Sustainability practices implementation -Sustainability practices improvement -Sustainability practices drivers -Sustainable marketing practices -Green practice motivators -Green manufacturing practices -Green marketing strategies -Sustainability green business practices -Financial management practices	-Green marketing -Sustainability innovation -Green marketing practices	-Sustainability initiatives -Business-driven -Sustainable innovation initiatives -Sustainable initiatives in organisational networks -Sustainability practices implementation -Sustainability practices improvement -Sustainability practices drivers -Sustainable marketing practices -Green practice motivators -Green manufacturing practices -Green marketing strategies -Sustainability green business practices -Financial management practices

Source: Author's own

Table 5.34 illustrates the almost lack of literature on several sustainability practices implementation aspects. Furthermore, the gaps of sustainability integration aspects in SA SMEs literature are identified in the section below.

5.3.9 Gaps in the literature related to the sustainability integration steps of South African SMEs

This section displays the diverse gaps identified in the literature on sustainability integration in the OP of SA SMEs illustrated below

Table 5.35: Gaps in sustainability integration aspects (1) in the SA SME reviewed literature

(1) Sustainability integration aspects covered in SME literature	Sustainability integration aspects covered in SA SME literature	Sustainability integration aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Integration of SDGs -Integration of ecological, social and economic aspects -Integration of sustainable procurement -Integration of ecological accountability -Integration of sustainability principles -Integration of sustainability elements -Integration of sustainable development practices -Integration of sustainability initiatives -Integration of sustainability-related targets -Integration of sustainable environmental management system -Integration of environmental management -Integration of green practices -Integration of green innovation -Integration of green behaviours -Integration of lean-green practice	-Integration of supply chain -Integration of GSCM practices	-Integration of SDGs -Integration of ecological, social & economic aspects -Integration of sustainable procurement -Integration of ecological accountability -Integration of sustainability principles -Integration of sustainability elements -Integration of sustainable development practices -Integration of sustainability initiatives -Integration of sustainability-related targets -Integration of sustainable environmental management system -Integration of environmental management -Integration of green practices -Integration of green innovation -Integration of green behaviours -Integration of lean-green practice

Source: Author's own

Table 5.35 exhibits the almost lack of literature on sustainability integration in SA SMEs, highlighting the gaps for future research. Furthermore, the gaps of other sustainability integration aspects in SA SME literature are identified in the table below.

Table 5.36: Gaps in sustainability integration aspects (2) in the SA SME reviewed literature

(2) Sustainability integration aspects covered in SME literature	Sustainability integration aspects covered in SA SME literature	Sustainability integration aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Integration of ecological sustainability considerations -Integration of ecological aspects -Integration of ecological and social sustainability -Integration of ecological and social governance practices -Integration of the circular economy (CE) concept -Integration of sustainability initiatives -Integration of SDG framework -Integration of environmental responsibility -Integration of ecological, social and economic aspects	-Integration of environmental responsibility principles	-Integration of ecological sustainability considerations -Integration of ecological aspects -Integration of ecological and social sustainability -Integration of ecological and social governance practices -Integration of the circular economy (CE) concept -Integration of sustainability initiatives -Integration of SDGs framework -Integration of ecological, social & economic aspects

Source: Author's own

Table 5.36 displayed the almost non-existent literature on sustainability integration in SA SMEs, highlighting the gaps for future research. The next table presents the gaps in sustainability balance approaches in the literatures on SA SMEs.

5.3.10 Gaps in the literature related to sustainability balance approaches of South African SMEs

This section provides a table designed to represent the identified gaps in the literature covering sustainability balance in SMEs operating in SA as follows:

Table 5.37: Gaps in sustainability balance aspects in the South African small and medium enterprise reviewed literature

Sustainability balance aspects covered in SME literature	Sustainability balance aspects covered in SA SME literature	Sustainability balance aspects not covered by SA SME literature
-Balance of TBL approaches -Balance of sustainability approaches -Balance of sustainability dimensions -Balance of sustainability aspects -Balance of sustainability practices -Balance of sustainability growth	No literature	-Balance of TBL approaches -Balance of sustainability approaches -Balance of sustainability dimensions -Balance of sustainability aspects -Balance of sustainability practices -Balance of sustainability growth

Source: Author's own

Table 5.38 illustrates the absence of literature on sustainability balance aspects in SA SMEs, highlighting the gaps for future research. The next section discusses the integrated categorical-conceptual framework of this study.

5.4 INTEGRATED CATEGORICAL-CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses the integrative categorical-conceptual framework designed in this study. Many studies have generated categories from their data collection but they have not used them during data analysis and knowledge building. This study tried to use them in the recommendations for knowledge building, framework and model construction.

The integrated categorical-conceptual framework encompasses multifaceted concepts and categories identified in the reviewed literature. It presents all the concepts generated from the selected literature and establishes links between them (Thomas Khun, 1962; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

There are countless categories generated from other studies, such as mathematics and quantitative studies in general, and particularly from both qualitative and management-related studies. However, those generated categories seem to be ignored when analysing data, developing frameworks, constructing models, building theories, and formulating the contribution of a study. A category includes a set of objects, arrows, a similarity relationship of paths (Spivak & Kent, 2012) with an arranged rule and combined law (Lane, 1998).

In this study, as explained in Chapter 3 based on the research methodology, categorisation was employed to group factors enabling and challenging sustainability and organisational performance. Given the high importance of categories, the development of a categorical framework could be very important in grouping categories with their related theories. However, these seem to be ignored in both qualitative and management studies.

According to Jabareen (2009), conceptual frameworks are the results of qualitative theorisation processes. A framework should integrate multiple approaches at diverse levels (Dansereau, et al., 1999). Emerging study frameworks are a necessity for reciprocal interaction and network connections (Schultz & Hatch, 2005). To emphasise, Callahan (2010, p. 302) formulated this statement: "*Conceptual frameworks make connections between multiple bodies of literature and knowledge bases to make claims toward a particular argument.*" The conceptual framework constructed here, linked various findings or knowledge generated from the integrative literature review conducted in this study.

A framework can encompass independent entities or interdependent entities (Dansereau, et al., 1984). Moreover, interdependent entities in a framework can be homogeneous and similar, or heterogeneous and diverse (Dansereau et al., 1999). This study developed a heterogeneous and diverse or mixed form of a conceptual framework encompassing not only concepts, but also various categories or categorical factors, such as corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, sustainability, and modernity factors.

A conceptual framework can be expanded from an existing one (Dansereau, et al., 1999). The principal conceptual novel framework developed in this section is based on the findings of the ILR and not extended from an existing one.

Liberati et al. (2009) suggested the listing and definition of all variables for which data were sought (e.g. PICOS, funding sources). Thus, the developed conceptual framework was labelled as an integrated categorical-conceptual framework, since it listed all categories or factors and concepts derived from the findings of the research enquiries.

The identification of concepts is the requirement of an appropriate database assessment (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Callahan, 2010). An amalgamation of literature allowed the clarification of connections between concepts (Okoli, 2012) which are the inputs to conceptual frameworks (Scott-Kemmis & Chitravas, 2007).

This study had three forms of enquiry. The first was based exclusively on OP in terms of enablers and challenges. The second concentrated only on sustainability enablers and challenges. The third dealt with both simultaneously, meaning it enquired about sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in OP. Therefore, the figure outlined in this section is a comprehensive view of the overall answers to the mentioned enquiries from the literature review conducted in this study.

The figure designed in this section was threefold, meaning a combination of the findings of the research questions for this study. The design encompassed two types of items. The first are the categories labelled as factors, generated in the findings of the research questions exclusive to OP, and the enquiries are restricted only to sustainability. It should be noted that even if individual research questions were separate for the two individual phenomena under study. However, the findings revealed that both OP and sustainability shared the same enablers and

challenge factors. Moreover, the second items were the concepts generated from the findings of the research questions, combining OP and sustainability.

This section discusses the components of the integrated conceptual framework, which represents the findings of the research questions of this study. For a better understanding of this sophisticated construction, it should be noted that the findings of the reviewed literature on enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability achievement generated several categories that were labelled as factors. The findings of the research generated concepts on sustainability implementation, integration and balance. The components of the framework below were simply a combination of categories and concepts generated from the findings of the reviewed literature of this study.

A categorical framework serves as guidance for the basic theory (Arney & Coronges, 2015) relevant to each category, including factors related to corporate governance, management, business, entrepreneurship, leadership, sustainability, and modernity identified in the collected literature of this study.

Generally, a categorical framework can be used for multiple purposes, such as using generalised functions in mathematical physics (Gifford & Finkelstein, 2020), identifying appropriate measures, methods and tools for specific categories (Arney & Coronges, 2015), developing a method or choosing the most suitable method (Landauer & Dumais, 1997; Abramsky & Coecke, 2004; Kartsaklis & Sadrzadeh, 2014), and developing suitable illustrations for practice (Arney & Coronges, 2015). In this study the categorical framework was developed to categorise OP and sustainability phenomena (Suh & Yang, 2014) in terms of their respective dimensions, to introduce categories (Ehrig, et al., 2010) as identified in the reviewed literature, a measuring tool for various categories (Arney & Coronges, 2015) in terms of suitable theory proposition, identifying the relationship between categories (Spivak & Kent, 2012) with supportive evidence, identifying specific correspondence between categories and factors (Barwise & Seligman, 1997), such as OP and sustainability components.

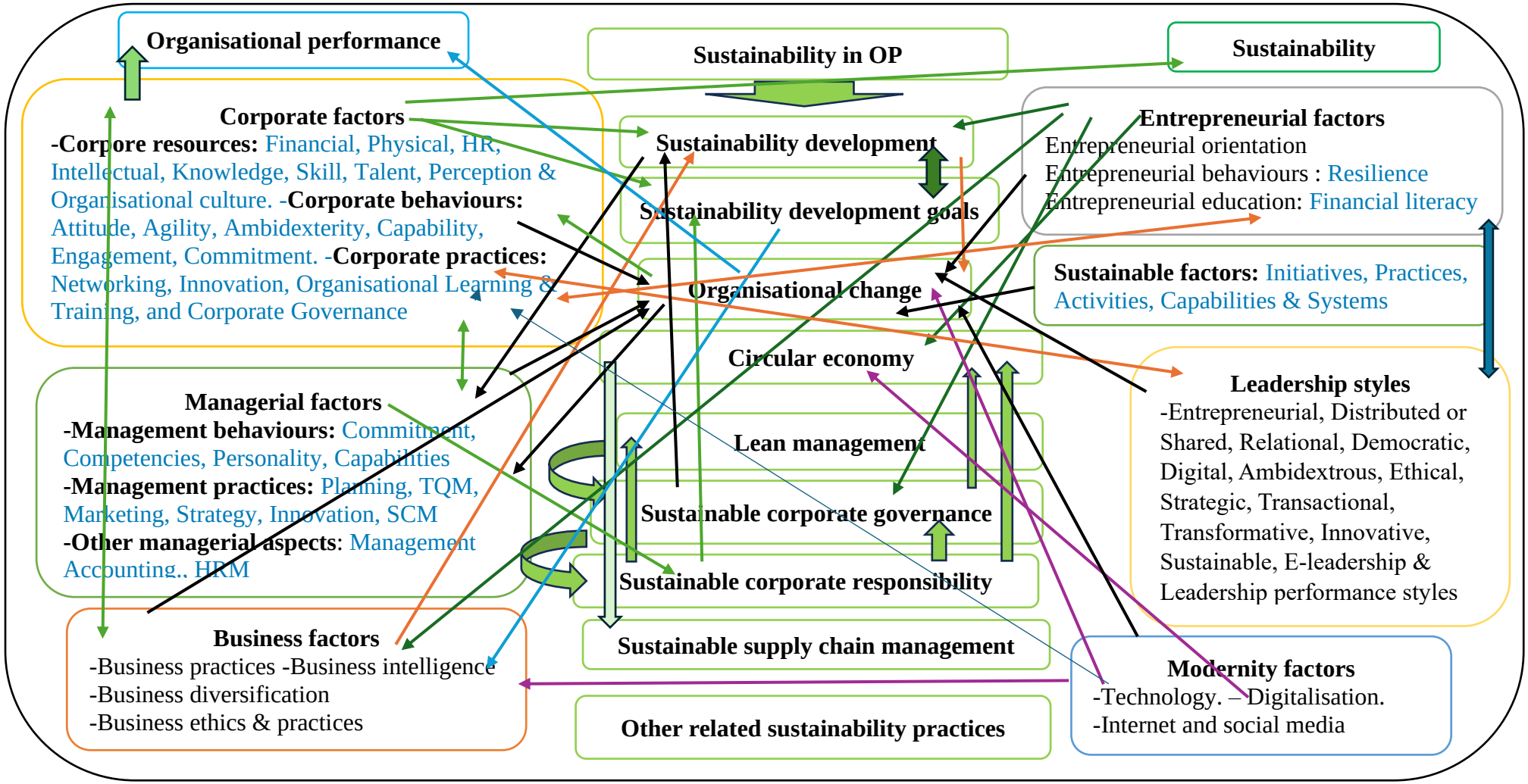
Goguen and Burstall (1992) suggested a standard presentation of a categorical framework. According to Krippendorff (2004), concepts, themes and theories are part of the categorisation. A category framework should encompass the objects that represent types of things (Spivak & Kent, 2012), such as categories, graphs, typed graphs, and hypergraphs (Ehrig, et al., 2010),

and the arrows represent the relationships and diagrams of the evidence (Sowa, 1992). The design should demonstrate the possibility of defining category theoretical concepts in terms of theory (Spivak & Kent, 2012).

A categorical framework is provided to link the fundamental core of the study and factors generated from the reviewed literature. The categorical framework was developed to describe (i) various factors enabling OP and sustainability achievement, (ii) equivalent factors enabling OP and sustainability achievement, (iii) OP dimensions., (iv) sustainability dimensions, reasoning units linked with one another into recognisable episodes; consider theoretical suggestions reasoning occurrences and consider curricular importance.

The figure below is a combination of categories fashioned from the collected literature and the study concepts derived from the reviewed literature. The established connections are demonstrated using arrows with different colours for better visibility of the existing relationships among and between factors and concepts, as discussed below the figure representing the framework.

Figure 5.1: Integrated categorical-conceptual framework



Source: Author's own

Figure 5.1 displays all the findings of the ILR conducted in this study. The figure was labelled an integrated categorical-conceptual framework because it incorporated categories generated from the findings of Research Questions RQ1 and 2. These categories were referred to as factors enabling and challenging the achievement of OP and sustainability, and concepts generated from the findings of RQs 1, 2 and 3 of this study.

The framework shows the categories or factors enabling and challenging OP and sustainability of SMEs and SA SMEs including organisational or corporate factors **(CFs)**, managerial factors **(MFs)** business factors **(BFs)**, entrepreneurial factors **(EFs)**, leadership factors **(LFs)**, modernity factors **(MOFs)**, and sustainable factors **(SFs)**, in addition to these, the components of each category were displayed in the framework. The main concepts of this framework are placed in the centre of the figure, included sustainable development **(SD)**, sustainable development goals (SDGs), organisational change **(OC)**, circular economy **(CE)**, lean management **(LM)**, sustainable corporate governance **(SCG)**, sustainable corporate social responsibility **(SCSR)** and sustainable supply chain management **(SSC)**.

First, the design identified possible relationships among categories. Second, probable links among categories, and third, feasible bonds between factors and concepts. The arguments were in the context of OP or sustainability, including any of the dimensions. It should be noted that the framework involved multiple elements, therefore, a single citation at least, was fair enough to confirm a link among and/ or between components of this design. The next section provides an overview on SD.

5.4.1 Sustainable development

This section briefly describes sustainable development (SD). Maheswari et al. (2018, p. 7) and WCED (1987, p. 23) stated this: "*Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* Society is an important principle of the sustainability notion (Endris & Kassegn, 2022). From a business standpoint, capital maximisation should not be the only objective of running affairs (Turekulova, et al., 2022). The subsequent section discusses SDGs.

5.4.2 Sustainable Development Goals

This section provides an overview of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability dimensions have the purpose of achieving economic prosperity, ecological safety, and societal impartiality (Muñoz-Torres et al., 2018). Sustainability achievement in companies should aim at the realisation of business goals (Mazur, 2014), corporate sustainability (Beneke, et al., 2016), and the attainment of SDGs (Pop, et al., 2019). Figure 5.39 below lists various goals of SD.

Figure 5.2: Sustainable development goals

Source: The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) (UN, 2015)

Figure 5.2 display the 17 SDGs. A set of development goals concentrated on governments' and worldwide assistance agencies' attention and efforts has been the international community agreement during the globalisation period (Auemsuvarn, 2019) to achieve the applicable goals. According to Kuwornu (2017), sustainability or the triple bottom line has now become a broad multi-focal agenda. The development goals should be related to each pillar of sustainability.

It is challenging to implement the SDGs (Kharrazi, et al., 2016; Filho, et al., 2019; Lee, et al., 2020; Henderson & Loreau, 2023). Similarly, achieving the SDGs is also a major challenge (Assefa, et al., 2017; Tucho & Kumsa, 2020; Nastasi, et al., 2022; Obaideen, et al., 2022). However, it remains impractical to consider each sustainability dimension when developing an

assessment framework (Matos & Hall, 2007; Hubbard, 2009; Varsei, et al., 2014). Seventeen (17) sustainable development goals count (Fu, et al., 2019; Zimon, et al., 2020; Halkos & Gkampoura, 2021; Ferrer-Estévez & Chalmeta, 2021). The following are the 17 SDGs:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Consequently, it is necessary to identify approaches to achieve the SDGs through sustainability of OP. The overview of organisational change is provided in below.

5.4.3 Organisational change

This section briefly discusses organisational change (OC). According to Lewis (2019), change is a prominent feature of a company since it allows the achievement of its goals, the identification of important challenges and corrective measures for past failures, as well as the improvement and growth which lead to innovative firms. Stouten, et al. (2018) acknowledge the frequent struggle faced by modern companies in fashioning expressive and sustainable changes. Accordingly, strategic change and adaptation were found to be crucial to OP as it maintained businesses relevancy and competitiveness in a dynamic business environment (Ketemaw & Amente, 2023), Moreover, strategic decisions impacting organisational structures have been the result of change management (Idogawa, et al., 2023). However, contemporary organisations often struggle to create meaningful, sustainable changes (Stouten, et al., 2018). The next section discusses the circular economy briefly.

5.4.4 Circular economy

This section discusses circularity as one of the sustainable practices of sustainability. It is well known as the circular economy which is the origin of the concept of the 3Rs– reduce, reuse, and recycle, with the objectives of lessening waste and energy upsurge, and resource efficiency (Chowdhury, et al., 2022a), and moving companies towards being sustainable, low-carbon, resource-efficient, and competitive economies (García-Quevedo, et al., 2020), which will lead to the success of the organisation at the operational and market levels. In short, circularity is more focused on environmental and economic sustainability. It is suggested to look at such practice from the cultural and social perspectives. CE practices lead to long-term sustainability (Le, et al., 2022). Lean management is discussed in the next section.

5.4.5 Lean management

This section describes lean management (LM). According to Dey, et al. (2020a), lean management pays attention to the economy and environment, and focuses on waste reduction through resource optimisation (Dey, et al., 2019). Further, Dey et al. (2020b) affirmed that lean management not only enables the implementation of ecological and social practices but also leads to SME efficiency and sustainability-oriented innovation. This indicates the importance

of implementing such practices in the achievement of sustainable operational performance of SMEs. The next section provides a short overview of sustainable corporate governance.

5.4.6 Sustainable corporate governance

This section briefly explains sustainable corporate governance (SCG). ESGs are recommended to improve a company's reputation and operational performance (Tóth, et al., 2021; Gholami, et al., 2022). Sustainable corporate responsibility is discussed in the next subsection.

5.4.7 Sustainable corporate responsibility

Sustainable corporate responsibility (SCR) is the responsible behaviour or practice of companies toward the sustainability notion, principles, and requirements. Following the fourth dimension of sustainability, there should be four types of corporate sustainable responsibility, which include corporate environmental responsibility, corporate economic responsibility, corporate social responsibility, and corporate cultural responsibility. However, the discussions below demonstrate that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the practice most adopted by SMEs and SA SMEs.

Rooi, et al. (2023) stated that the frequent use of CSR leads to the enhancement of business sustainability and meeting stakeholder responsibilities. The implementation of CSR improves the environmental, economic, social, and cultural aspects of a company and is advantageous to SME market performance involving stakeholders as a component (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3), of the market performance dimension (Kohont & Zajc, 2019). The next section explains the sustainable supply chain management.

5.4.8 Sustainable supply chain management

This section explains that sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) is a combination of supply chain management and sustainability concepts (Mukhsin & Suryanto, 2022) and leads to lasting sustainability (Le et al., 2022). The author added that it applies to all company activities to improve the sustainability of their supply chains. The next section discusses the connections of the key concepts of the categorical-conceptual framework.

5.4.9 Probable relationships amongst key concepts

The current section discusses the association between the concepts generated from the findings of sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in OP.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between SD and SDGS:*** There is a strong connection between sustainability and SDGs (Fonseca et al., 2022). In other words, sustainability and SDGs are linked and cannot be broken.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between SD and CG***: There is a relationship between corporate governance and corporate sustainability (Aras & Crowther, 2008).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between SD and OC***: Sustainability achievement identifies changes (Jenkins, 2002). In the same way, to achieve sustainability, changes need to be adopted and implemented (Jenkins, 2002). To some extent, it is said that SD depends on OC.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between SD and LM***: Martínez-Jurado and Moyano-Fuentes (2014) identified an association between LM and sustainability.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between SD and SSCM***: The links between lean supply chain management and sustainability were identified by Martínez-Jurado and Moyano-Fuentes (2014).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CG and SDGS:*** Martínez-Ferrero and García-Meca (2020) confirmed the individual non-duality of the CEO. The independence act of the board determined a company's inputs to the 2030 SDG agenda.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CG and CSR***: To prove this, Jamali, et al. (2008) recognised CG as a mandatory backing to sustainable CSR. Firms' CSR engagement was delayed by the variables of CG (Jo & Harjoto, 2012). The converse,

CG variables were not affected by the postponement of CSR (Jo & Harjoto, 2012). These indicate that CG enables the achievement of CSR.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CG and CE***: It was assumed that the level of CE disclosure was directly impacted by the board size and gender diversity of the board (Esposito, et al., 2023) and considered as CG components. Although CE strategies were not directly affected by CG performance (Palea, et al., 2024), they were supported by other CG mechanisms (Palea et al., 2024). Furthermore, CG mechanisms can promote the adoption of CE business models (Palea et al., 2024). CE might be seen as a dependable variable of CG.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CG and LM:*** As proof of this statement, Bunker, et al. (2022) indicated that satisfactory evaluations of ecological, societal, and corporate-governance factors were achieved through lean firms but not by non-lean corporations.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CSR and SDGs***: For instance, social and ecological responsibilities facilitated SDGs' achievement (Chien, 2023). Organisations can act responsibly due to the provided SDG framework (Fonseca et al., 2022). This implies that an organisation's responsible behaviour relies on the prescribed acts of SDGs.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CSR and CE***: It was confirmed that in theory, studies argued the interconnectedness between CSR and CE (Morea, et al., 2023). According to Esposito, et al. (2023), the level of CE disclosure in the integrated reports impacted positively on the presence of a CSR committee. Esken, et al. (2018) acknowledged the existence of numerous crossing points between strategic CSR and CE. The authors asserted that several key success factors of CSR linked strategically with CE, whereas the awareness of CSR was a signal for CE. In addition, the implementation of CSR models pointed toward circularity (Morea et al., 2023). CSR and CE methods should be favoured by managers and policymakers for the benefit of all stakeholders (Morea, et al., 2023). The emergence of CE methods could be tacitly

encouraged by CSR (Morea et al., 2023). Therefore, similar to the CG and CE, CE was linked to CSR, indicating the rise of CE depended on CSR.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CSR and LM:*** According to Dey et al. (2022), CSR practices facilitated lean management performance to attain sustainability performance.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between CE and SSCM***: The CE practices impacted SSCM (Le et al., 2022). The link between CEP and SP was mediated by sustainable SCM (Le et al., 2022). Le et al. (2022) stated that "*the better the CE practices, the more the SCM is sustainable.*" This indicates that SSCM depends on CE.

The following section discusses probable connections between the categories or factors of the categorical-conceptual framework.

5.4.11 Probable relationships between factors

As exhibited in the framework constructed in this chapter, section 5.4, this section discusses the relationship between the seven categories generated from the findings of the reviewed literature on OP, sustainability challenges and enablers. The factors of the labelled categories include CFs, MFs, BFs, EFs, LFs, MOFs and SFs, and their connections as stated below:

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and managerial factors***: Organisation and management are directly linked (Dolan, et al., 2000). At the same time, there is a link between management practice, organisational design and the measurement of organisational effectiveness of people and finance, which are influenced by both organisational design itself and managerial style (Lansley, et al., 1974). In addition, management of growth cannot be interrupted by organisations (Batsleer & Dejonghe,, 1994). Organisations might not be able to operate without management. Thus, quality management systems should be implemented usefully in organisations (Stravinskiene & Serafinas, 2020) for quality organisations' operations, performance, and functioning. More suitable organisational designs and managerial schemes are decided by understanding organisations are total systems (Kast &

Rosenzweig, 1972). Organisational creativity and new activities are implemented by educated managers and influenced by their attitude, orientation, and functional areas in the organisation (Mostafa, 2005). In future, the management of organisations will no longer be effective through rigid objectives and instructions (Dolan, et al., 2003).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and business factors***: Phonthanukitithaworn et al. (2023) suggested there is equilibrium between a good policy and business needs. As discussed in Chapter 4, a policy is a component of CG categorised as a corporate factor. In line with the statement above, it is suggested that CFs are linked to BFs. According to Artto and Wikström (2005), business is run by organisations. In other words, no organisation leads to no business. Likewise, widespread organisational activity requires a strong business partnership (Peppard & Ward, 1999). These justify the link between organisation and business.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and entrepreneurial factors***: Organisation or corporate is linked to entrepreneurship. For instance, the corporate sector has progressively applied entrepreneurship (Johnson, 2001). Sapsed, et al. (2007) suggest that design choices and brokerage capabilities are the determinants of effective connections between organisation activity and entrepreneurial opportunities. Entrepreneurial activities rely on its relationship approach with the important organisational actors and the benefits of such links (Finn, 2021). Entrepreneurs play primary roles in the emergence of organisations, such as the acquisition of appropriate knowledge and the creation of social capital (Yamada, 2004). Organisational characteristics are related to current conditions for corporate entrepreneurship (Veenker, et al., 2008). Entrepreneurial intention to quit is significantly predicted by organisational culture (Kolisang, 2011).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and leadership factors***: This study listed factors, such as corporate resources, behaviours and practices included in organisational or corporate factors and organisational capital and learning. There was a positive relationship between the tested leadership practices and the organisational culture elements (Niemann & Kotze, 2006). The leadership behaviours improved

organisational life (Bulatova, 2015) and numerous learning techniques enhanced and affected the development of leadership competencies (Brown & Posner, 2001). This indicates that corporate factors affect leadership factors, and vice-versa demonstrating the inter-dependence between the two factors.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and modernity factors***: Organisational ambidexterity plays a role in I4.0 technologies (Alkaraan, et al., 2023). Clearly, organisational ambidexterity and technology are connected.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between entrepreneurial factors and business factors***: Pizzi, et al. (2022) recognised the dominant role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in the transformation towards a more maintainable business model.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between entrepreneurial factors and leadership factors****:* Entrepreneurial intention to quit is significantly predicted by leadership orientation (Kolisang, 2011).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between modernity factors and business factors***: Digitalisation had effect on the business efficiency (Ahmad & Murray, 2019). **To prove it.,** the global business landscape in the worldwide have undergone a major transformation due to digital technologies' progress (Turekulova et al., 2022).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between modernity factors and corporate factors:*** According to Davies and Van Vuuren (2021), there is a constant and positive link between innovation and new technology given that without new technology innovation cannot happen.

The subsequent section discusses probable connections between factors and key concepts of the categorical-conceptual framework.

5.4.12 Probable relationships between factors and key concepts

This section discusses the existing links between factors that were generated from the findings regarding OP, sustainability challenges, enablers, and concepts generated from the findings regarding sustainability implementation, integration and balance in OP as displayed in the developed integrated categorical-conceptual framework in this study.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between all factors and OC***: Factors influence changes (Dansereau et al., 1999).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and SD***: Sustainability reporting was found to be the organisations' key component (Domingues, et al., 2017), which means that companies cannot operate without sustainability. Corporate factors, for instance, corporate practices, such as CG were linked to SD. To illustrate, sustainability achievement requires organisational structure (Jenkins, 2002). Phonthanukitithaworn et al. (2023) suggested there is equilibrium between a good policy and SD, whereas, sustainability achievement necessitated legislative provision (Jenkins, 2002).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and SDGS:*** Social and ecological responsibilities and SDGs' achievement relationships were arbitrated by innovative culture (Chien, 2023). Organisational culture was classified by categorising the findings in this study. The corporate factors enabling and challenging OP and sustainability were among the corporate resources. Therefore, CFs were assumed to be linked to SDGS.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and OC***: The identification of OC requires organisational structure (Jenkins, 2002). Legislative provisions were compulsory to detect the needed changes (Jenkins, 2002). In other words, changes depend on legislation and structures which are the components of CG.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between organisational change and OP and SD***: A survey conducted with executives in UK confirmed that OC led to high-performance achievement (Holbeche, 2006; Stouten et al., 2018).

- ✓ ***There are links between entrepreneurial orientation and sustainability***: According to Phonthanukitithaworn et al. (2023), innovative maturity of entrepreneurial orientation principles of sustainability principles.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and CSR***: A study by Chien (2023) confirmed the significant links between ecological and societal responsibilities and SDGs attainment in logistic Malaysian companies.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between corporate factors and CE***: Alkaraan, et al. (2023) acknowledged organisational ambidexterity' s role in CE techniques.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between managerial factors and CSR*****:** According to Graafland and Bovenberg (2020) and Turekulova et al. (2022), the adoption by SMEs of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate environmental responsibility was motivated by top managers.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between managerial factors and SD*****:** Sustainability achievement necessitated management mechanisms (Jenkins, 2002).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between managerial factors and OC*****:** Management mechanisms were the requirement for the identification of OC (Jenkins, 2002). For instance, Domingues, et al. (2017) confirmed the links that exist between sustainability reporting and the management of OC for sustainability.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between business factors and SDGs*****:** Fonseca et al. (2022, p. 4) stated this: "*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for businesses to act responsibly."* This indicates the connection between

business factors and SDGs, with businesses operating by following SDGs' rules or requirements.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between entrepreneurial factors and CSR*:** Starting a business means undertaking entrepreneurial risks and challenges (Papulová & Papula, 2015). In this study, risk taking was categorised under corporate responsibility. In line with the mentioned statement, one might assume that entrepreneurship is linked to corporate responsibility in all its forms like social and environmental responsibilities.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between entrepreneurial factors and CG*:** Albu and Mateescu's (2015) findings demonstrated the relationship between board independence and institutional ownership, which are CG mechanisms and corporate entrepreneurship.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between entrepreneurial factors and CE***: Pizzi, et al. (2022) acknowledged the central role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in the change towards a more circular business model.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between leadership factors and OC***: According to Vance and Larson (2002), qualities of leadership styles were positively associated with OC.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between modernity factors and CE***: According to Pizzi et al. (2022), digital platforms had an enabling role for a CE, in particular, they can change towards circular business models for SMEs.

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between modernity factors and OC***: As boosted by innovative technology, organisations and their members promptly engaged and attempted the management of planned change (Kotter, 1996; Burnes, 2005). Similarly, substantial pressure to modernism was sourced by OC (Stouten et al., 2018). In addition, OC for sustainability was driven by the use of sustainability reporting as a communication tool (Domingues, et al., 2017).

- ✓ ***There are probable relationships between business factors and SD***: According to Phonthanukitithaworn et al. (2023), business efficiency boosts SME growth and involvement in SD.

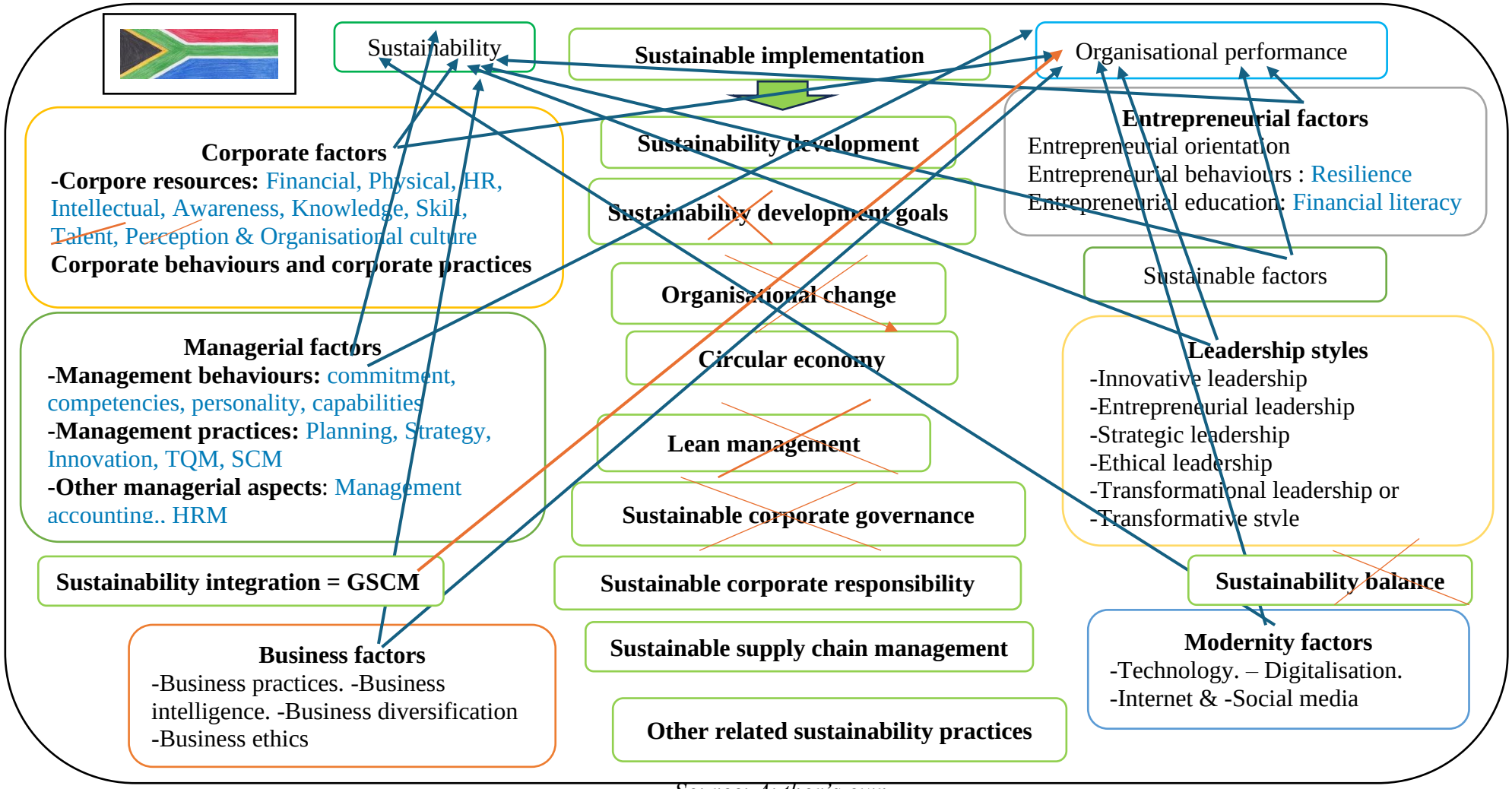
There are probable relationships between entrepreneurial factors and SD: According to Arko-Achemfuor (2017) the contribution of entrepreneurship is important to SD. This was achieved through job creation (Endris & Kassegn, 2022), economic growth (Endris & Kassegn, 2022), innovation, improvement of social conditions, and addressing ecological and social challenges (Arko-Achemfuor, 2017). In the same way, living standards and consumption potentials are improved by job incomes provided by entrepreneurial ventures (Liebich, 2013). Commonly known, job creation, lives, consumptions, and economic growth are the SD components. Hence, entrepreneurship itself and its related aspects might be directly linked to SD. The contextual framework is discussed in the following section.

5.5 CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section provides the contextual framework of this study. This framework is different from the integrated categorical framework which displayed the findings of the overall study including both SMEs operating in the rest of the world and SA SMEs. The contextual framework was generated from the findings; and simultaneously, is the summary of the findings on sustainability and OP of SA SMEs, as acknowledged in the title of this study.

Figure 5.3 showed the summarised findings only of SA SMEs.

Figure 5.3: Contextual framework of South African Sas Performance and Sustainability



Source: Author's own

Grounded from the findings of the literature of SA SMEs only, Figure 5.40 labelled as a contextual framework shows SA SMEs' performance and sustainability are challenged and enabled by corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity, and sustainable factors. However, perception and talent were not found to be among the corporate resources enabling the achievement of OP in SA SMEs. Nevertheless, entrepreneurial leadership, strategic leadership, ethical leadership, transformational leadership, or transformative styles were found to be the only five leadership styles implemented in SA SMEs. Whereas green supply chain management was the only sustainability aspect integrated in OP of SA SMEs.

Furthermore, although sustainable supply chain management, sustainable corporate responsibility, circular economy sustainable development (SD) and other sustainability related practices were implemented in SA SMEs, however, sustainable corporate governance, lean management, organisational change, and sustainable development goals (SDGs) were not implemented in SA SMEs. In the same way, sustainability was not balanced in SA SMEs. An appropriate theory should be selected for the integrated analytical framework when investigating a specific concept linked to a precise phenomenon (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The following section is focused on the building theories used in this study.

5.6 THEORY BUILDING

Theory building was not the purpose of this study. However, this section discusses theory building as a contribution of the study. As discussed in Chapter 4, ILR contributes to the development of new theories built from the findings of the ILR and explained how they were built. They are considered as the summary of the findings and suggestions for companies' success. The next section lists steps for theory development in a qualitative study.

5.6.1 Steps for theory-building in qualitative research

The building theory process is lively (Handfield & Melnyk, 1998), and iterative (Christensen & Sundahl, 2001). According to Reynolds (1971), the difference between science and common sense is discerned by the theory-building process. However, there is no strong consecutive process for theory-building (Handfield & Melnyk, 1998). In contrast, a theory-building pathway encompasses two sides, ***inductive and deductive*** (Christensen & Bower, 1996;

Danneels, 2004). Inductive theory-building goes from specific theories to general theories. Deductive starts with general theory building to form a definite assumption. The ILRM conducted in this study considered SMEs in general and SA SMEs. Accordingly, theories were built from the broad perspective of SMEs to the specific case of the SA context.

Nevertheless, ***descriptive stage and normative stage*** are the two key stages of theory construction (Carlile & Christensen, 2004). In each of these, a theory is built following three steps, namely ***observation, classification (categorisation), and definition of relationships (association)*** for descriptive theory-building (Christensen & Sundahl, 2001). This study followed those processes.

- ***First step: Observation***

According to Bower (1970), and Christensen (2006) the ***observation*** of a phenomena is the first step of theory-building, which is the starting point for the scientific process (Gregore, 2009). A theory is an accurate prediction of what will be observed and tested of a phenomenon under numerous circumstances (Christensen & Sundahl, 2001). This is generally done by quantitative and mixed methods; hence, theory-building of qualitative research might be considered as an observable or testing instrument for future quantitative research and mixed methods. Indeed, theories built from the ILRM conducted in this study of successful OP of SMEs, successful SME sustainability, and sustainable SME performance in general and particularly in South Africa, have the potential of being tested in the future through the adoption of quantitative and mixed methods research approaches. Similarly, these theories might potentiality be extended in future through qualitative investigations.

- ***Second step: Categorisation***

Bendassolli (2013) considered theories as devices though their experience is systematised or organised. The author added that the coding procedure identifies patterns in the data and develops themes and, thereafter, these themes or codes are classified or grouped into categories. Therefore, the theories built in this chapter involved all categories derived from the literature review.

❖ ***Third step: Association***

Theory formulates the link between experiences and results, cause and effects (Bendassolli, 2013), or variables or elements of the research (Van Maanen et al. 2007; Burton-Jones, McLean & Monod, 2011). Besides that, Bendassolli (2013) suggested that theory should be related to the empirical data. This is the reason why all theories built in this study are directly related to the findings of the conducted ILR.

Empirical content should be included in theoretical statements (Bendassolli, 2013). Thus, the developed theory statements contained corporate, management, business, entrepreneurship, leadership, sustainability and modernity factors as enablers or challenges of OP and sustainability achievements, as well as sustainability integration steps, implementation phases and equilibrium approaches in OP of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Bendassolli (2013) suggested the literal interpretation of theories should not be sentences, statements, propositions associated with observations, but should be considered as facts (Maxwell, 2011). The fact is that this study collected and reviewed a multiplicity of literature from various databases and types of publications, such as journals, conference papers, books, handbooks, dissertations, and theses as well as reports. The built theories from the publications selected were automatically considered as truth. Thus, theories built here were not simply judgements, declarations or suggestions but truths about OP and sustainability and their properties in SA SMEs and SMEs in general.

❖ ***Fourth step: Turning the findings of the current study into theories***

To simplify the understanding of theory-building, this study suggested that in theory-building the findings of the actual study be turned into theories that should be emphasised by a or chosen theory which should be supported by other existing theories.

5.6.2 Approach of theories building in this study

According to Umanath (2003) and Gacenga, et al. (2011), factors that explain or predict expected phenomena are analytically introduced and supposed to underly theoretical suggestions. The development of various theories has been based on contingency analysis (Thai & Turkina, 2014). This study dealt with two phenomena, such as OP and sustainability. In the

building of novel contingency theories for this study, factors explicating or predicting expected sustainability and OP were analytically introduced and assumed. Thus, taken from the analysis and interpretations of the reviewed literature, the content of the novel theories here introduced organisational or corporate factors, likewise managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership and modernity, and the sustainable factors explaining or predicting the enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability. They might also be considered as the contingencies of OP and sustainability achievement and failure.

Therefore, to explain the above, the study developed six novel theories of contingencies explaining or predicting OP and sustainability success which included the contingency theory of successful SMEs' organisational performance, contingency theory of successful SMEs' sustainability, and contingency theory of sustainable SMEs' performance. Contingencies explaining or predicting OP and sustainability failure comprised contingency theory of unsuccessful SMEs' organisational performance, contingency theory of unsuccessful SMEs' sustainability and contingency theory of unsustainable SMEs' performance as discussed in detail in the sections below. Theories other than the contingency theory were suggested in Section 5.3 of this chapter to emphasise the discussions of new contingency theories developed in this study.

According to Bendassolli (2013), categories should be compared to theories and other findings discussed in the relevant and extant literature. In line with the findings of the reviewed literature, corporate or organisational, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity and sustainable factors or categories were the contingencies of successful organisational performance, unsuccessful organisational performance, successful sustainability and unsuccessful sustainability of SMEs and SA SMEs. Sustainability implementation, integration and balance were suggested to be the contingencies of sustainable organisational performance of SMEs in general and those operating in SA. The following section discusses the contingency theory of successful OP.

5.6.3 Contingency theory of successful organisational performance

This section discusses the contingency theory of the successful performance of organisations. The purpose of CT is the determination of how the projected performance of organisations is affiliated with the internal and external environment of a business (Homburg, et al., 2012;

Patrono, 2016). The contingency theory of successful organisational performance (CTSOP) of SMEs explains the factors that are internal and external to the SME environment. It has the potential of enabling OP achievement in those companies' SMEs or predicted those factors through the suggestion statements related to the context of this study. Therefore, seven assumptions stated CTSOP as follows:

1. Contingency Theory of Successful Organisational Performance (CTSOP) assumed that the success of OP of organisation is enabled by various corporate or organisational factors: This study categorised organisational resources, corporate behaviours, and corporate practices as the contingents of OP achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs. CT declares that some organisational characteristics are related to OP under a variety of working conditions (Child, 1975). Likewise, CT directs the alignment of organisational characteristics to eventualities, reflecting the organisation's state to achieve organisational effectiveness (Maletic, et al., 2018). Enhanced OP is achieved by the contingency factors of an organisational system (Hamann, 2017). Organisational effectiveness was interpreted by contingency theories (Tosi & Slocum, 1984).

CT facilitated the connection between performance and organisational variables (Chung & Davies, 2003). Contingency factors are the contextual aspects moderating the affiliation between the organisational scheme and its performance (Hamann, 2017). To emphasise the theories of the organisation, Bansal and DesJardine (2014) suggested the stepping and classification of organisations' activities for the long-term achievement of organisational outcomes achievement.

Corporate resources acknowledge OP as contingent in the discussions of the reviewed literature in Chapter 4. According to the resource-based theory, SME owners with valuable resources perform better (Farrington, 2017). The resource-based theory by Han, et al. (2017) assumed that competitiveness security was the contingent of human, material capitals and capacity accessibility and improvement. However, before reaching competitiveness, valuable capitals are needed. This study's researcher believes that competitiveness cannot be achieved without all forms of the resources mentioned in Chapter 4, Section 4.7.1, such as human, physical, financial, social, knowledge, talent, skill, awareness, perception, intellectual capital and organisational culture resources or capitals.

In line with the discussions of Chapter 4, Section 4.7.1, organisational capability is considered as the contingent of OP achievement in SMEs. According to the resource-based theory, a competitive advantage is provided by the development of organisation capability shared with competitors (Ricciardi, et al., 2021). Similarly, SME owners with valuable capabilities were required to perform better than SME owners without those capabilities (Farrington, 2017).

Furthermore, organisational learning as a corporate practice was the contingency of OP in SMEs (Mwakalikamo, 2020) and in SA SMES (Venkatachalam et al., 2020). This was in line with MT which asserted that occasionally, learning could be a success for the improvement of the common good (Ricciardi, et al., 2021).

2. Contingency Theory of Successful Organisational Performance (CTSOP) assumed that the success of OP of a company is enabled by multiple managerial factors*:* In Chapter 4, Section 4.8 the discussion of the reviewed literature enumerated various managerial factors enabling the achievement of OP in SMEs. As an example, the managerial role had a direct and an indirect influence on the high-performance achievement among small firms in Ghana (Ugheoke, 2021). To emphasise this assumption, under a variety of working condition, CT declares that some management characteristics are related to OP (Child, 1975). Similarly, the **MT** suggested the involvement of managers from the diverse occupations in corporate labelling (Schultz & Hatch, 2005). In this study, managers have proven that managerial aspects go beyond by influencing the achievement of OP.

CTSOP assumed that the success of OP is enabled by modernism factors: Several studies discussed in this study demonstrated that big data analytics was the contingent of the achievement of SMEs' performance (Maroufkhani et al., 2020; Mangla et al., 2021; Lutfi et al., 2022; Maroufkhani et al., 2023). The ***MT*** by Fiorini, et al. (2018) supported the concept that big data was helpful in the monitoring, evaluation, prediction of costs and played a role in creating an organisational competitive advantage.

The assumption of the Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Organisational Performance (CTUOP) as formulated in this study is that the lack of managerial factors led to the failure of OP within an organisation. This assumes that corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity and sustainable factors were the contingencies of OP failure in SMEs.

CT acknowledges the existence of numerous factors affecting the adoption of management methods and practices by organisations, which affect organisational design and performance, as well as the adoption of market changes (Luthans & Stewart, 1977)

Mainstream MT acknowledges the persistent failures of organisational learning inputs to the common good (Ricciardi et al., 2021). Likewise, the same theory supported the interaction of organisational learning with network societal-level learning at times led to success in enhancing the common good (Ricciardi et al., 2021).

3. Contingency Theory of unsuccessful Organisational Performance (CTUOP) assumed that the failure of OP is caused by organisational or corporate factors: This was also the view of the mainstream management theories by Ricciardi, et al. (2021).

4. Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Organisational Performance (CTUOP) assumed that the failure of OP is caused by managerial factors: The findings of this study showed that the lack of strategic planning (Majama & Magang, 2017). poor managerial practices (Hristov et al., 2022), poor management in SA SMEs (Saah & Musvoto, 2020), accounting (Marques et al., 2020), management accounting challenges (Endrikat et al., 2017), supply chain management constraints in Botswana's SMEs (Nkwabi, 2019) and SA SMEs (Loury-Okoumba & Mafini, 2021) were some examples of managerial factors that challenged SME performance. Similarly, **MT** by Schultz and Hatch (2003) affirmed that the top management level and the lower levels in organisations were crossed by managerial challenges.

5. Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Organisational Performance (CTUOP) assumed that the failure of OP is caused by business factors: The findings of the literature reviewed recognised business strategy (Lestari et al., 2020) and green business strategy (Leonidou, et al., 2017), as well as business incubation (Van der Spuy & Bornman, 2024) and business incubation challenges (Van der Spuy & Bornman, 2023) in SA SMEs were the published examples of business factors challenging OP.

6. Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Organisational Performance (CTUOP) assumed that the failure of OP is caused by modernism factors: The literature reviewed for this study recognised the major roles played by technological challenges in boosting a sustainable

competitive advantage and sustainable business performance (Haseeb, et al., 2019). The CT by Li, et al. (2022) counted the application ICT amongst contingent factors affecting the design of service delivery systems.

7. Contingency Theory of Unsuccessful Organisational Performance (CTUOP) assumed that the failure of OP is caused by sustainable factors: Social challenges played major roles in boosting a sustainable competitive advantage and sustainable business performance (Hussain et al., 2019).

5.6.4 Contingency theory of successful sustainability

This section discusses the contingency theory of successful sustainability of organisations. The Contingency Theory of Successful Sustainability (CTSS) of SMEs describes factors enabling the achievement of sustainability in SMEs or predicted those factors through suggested statements.

1. ***Contingency Theory of Successful Sustainability (CTSS) assumed that the achievement of sustainability is enabled by corporate factors:*** Theories of the organisation, according Bansal and Des Jardine (2014) suggested the organisational activities categorisation for the long-standing attainment of social results.

2. ***Contingency Theory of Successful Sustainability (CTSS) assumed that the achievement of sustainability is enabled by managerial factors****:* In this study, given that corporate social responsibility (CSR) was found to be amongst the sustainability components, it might be said that the achievement of CSR can be enhanced by managerial factors as proven in the reviewed literature. Managers did their best for CSR in Romanian SMEs (Saveanu, et al., 2021). Also, this statement supported the management theory that acknowledged the accountability of managers in CSR (Schultz & Hatch, 2005).

3. ***Contingency Theory of unsuccessful Sustainability (CTUS) assumed that the failure of sustainability is caused by modernism factors:*** In this study, technology was assumed to be the modernism contingent of sustainability failure in SMEs and SA SMES. The literature review conducted, found IT in Nigeria (Ajibade & Mutula, 2019) and Industry 4.0 in SA (Blose & Okeke-Uzodike, 2020). This was in line with the CT

by Li et al. (2022) who specified that the application of ICT was the contingent factor affecting sustainability initiatives. Moreover, the management theory by Fiorini et al. (2018) supported that big data monitored, evaluated, and predicted sustainability problems.

The fit between an organisation's structures, strategies and environmental conditions is the concern of CT (Chung & Davies, 2003). CT suggests that the required organisational design responses for greater performance is determined by its ecological situation (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Donaldson, 2001). In CT, environment, size, and sustainability commitment determine an organisation's behaviours (Fernández-Robin, et al., 2019).

Based on the above, this study intended to explore the underlying contingencies of sustainability integration, implementation, and balance, as well as sustainable OP and sustainable SMEs. Through CT, the most influential contingent factors in the adoption, implementation, and consequences of ecological practices were identified (Fernández-Robin, et al., 2019). CT was used in this study to identify contingent factors related to OP and environmental, social, and economic sustainability practices, as well as contingent factors related to the integration, implementation and balancing of environmental, social and economic sustainability aspects.

5.6.5 Contingency theory of sustainable performance

This section discusses the contingency theory of sustainable performance of organisations. Contingency Theory of Sustainable Organisational Performance **(CTSust.OP)** of SMEs described or predicted sustainability or sustainable factors involved in the achievement of sustainability in SMEs or predicted those factors through the suggested statements.

Contingency theory of sustainable performance (CTSust.OP) assumed that sustainable performance of a company might be achieved through sustainability implementation, integration, and balance of in OP. Also, the failure of sustainable performance of a company is caused by a lack or poor sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in OP.

Considering the above, CT was deemed appropriate in identifying factors affecting sustainable OP design, sustainable SMEs, environmental, social, and economic performance, and financial,

operational and market share performance, in the adoption of transformative profitability, productivity and market share. This provides an opportunity to develop theories for sustainable management and sustainable organisational characteristics related to sustainable OP, including sustainable profitability, sustainable productivity, sustainable market share and sustainable growth.

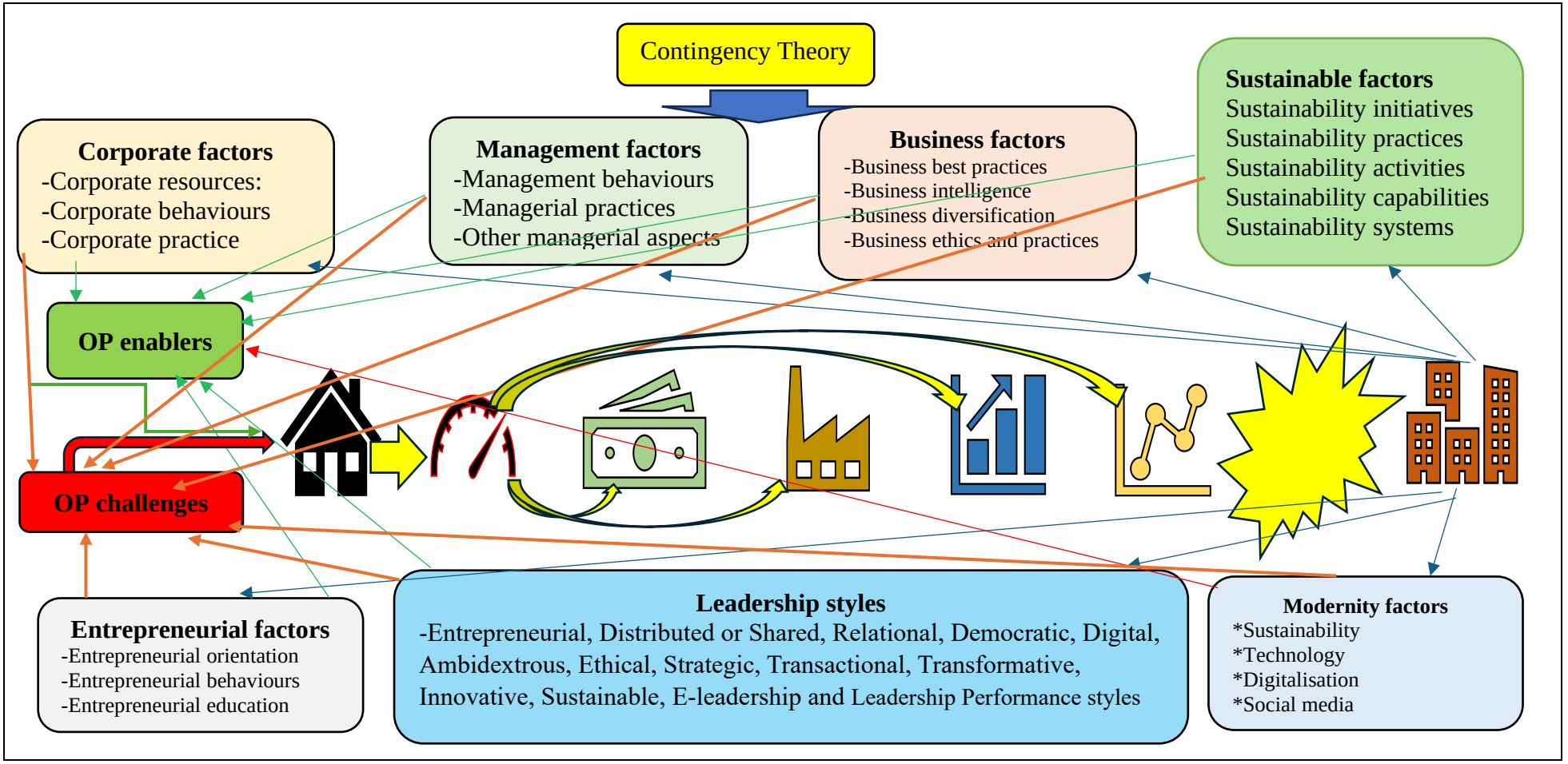
5.7 DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS MODELS

Three business models were built as a contribution to this study. The first model was based on the findings related to the enablers or challenges of OP in SMEs. The second was generated from the findings related to the enablers of challenges of sustainability in SMEs. The third and last one was the combination the findings about enablers of challenges of sustainability, and enablers of challenges of OP, as well as sustainability implementation phases, sustainability implementation steps and sustainability implementation, including the developed contingency theory. These models are also the recommendations of this study They were interpreted in line with all OP and sustainability components provided in Chapter 2.

5.7.1 Business model for successful small and medium enterprises organisational performance

The first model (Figure 5.4) can be summarised as follows: This model acknowledged that OP of SMEs was challenged by corporate, business, managerial, entrepreneurial, modernity, leadership, and sustainable factors that might negatively affect its finance, market, growth, and operational performance dimensions. but if they manage those factors intelligently it can be to their advantage by becoming the enablers leading SMEs to the achievement of productivity, profitability, competitiveness and expansion. The model suggested the establishment of relationships between those factors and each OP dimension, such as financial, operational. market and growth performance dimensions. For its feasibility, each factor should be linked to a sustainability perspective.

Figure 5.4 Business model for successful small and medium enterprises' organisational performance



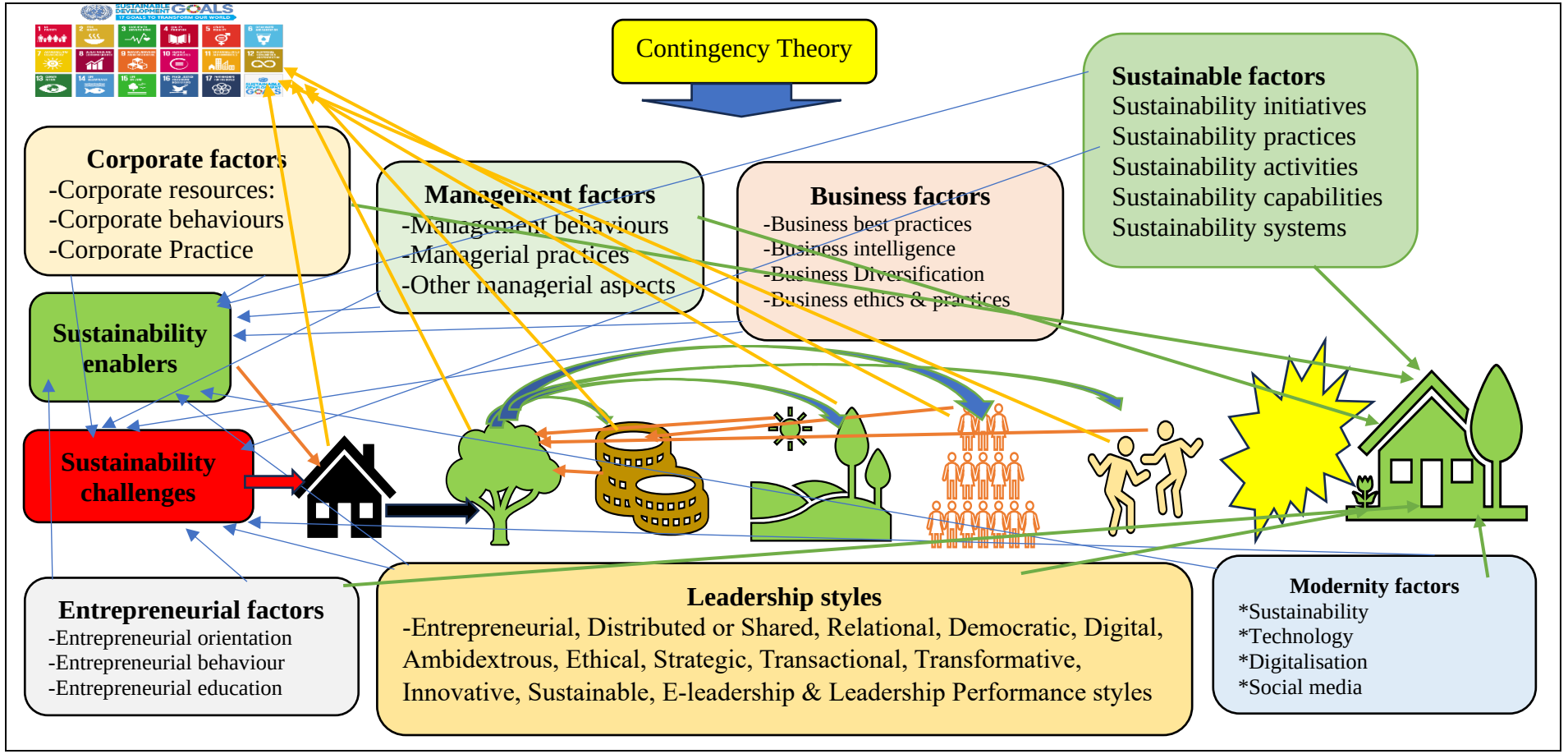
Source: Author's own

The interpretation of Figure: 5.4 has been provided above the figure in Section 5.7.1., and the statements formulated under this section are supported by the contingency theory. The above model combined two contingency theories discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, such as: CT of OP and CT of SMEs.

5.7.2 Business model for successful small and medium enterprises sustainability

Figure 5.5 below is the second model and can be summarised as follows: this model acknowledges that sustainability of SMEs was challenged by corporate, business, managerial, entrepreneurial, modernity, leadership, and sustainable factors that can negatively affect the achievement of its social, economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability. However, if organisations manage these factors intelligently, it can be to their advantage by becoming the enablers leading to the achievement of their social, economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability objectives. For its feasibility each factor should be linked to each sustainability perspective, such as environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability dimensions. For successful sustainability, SMEs should also consider the 17 SDGs. These statements are supported by the contingency theory.

Figure 5.5: Business model for successful small and medium enterprises' sustainability



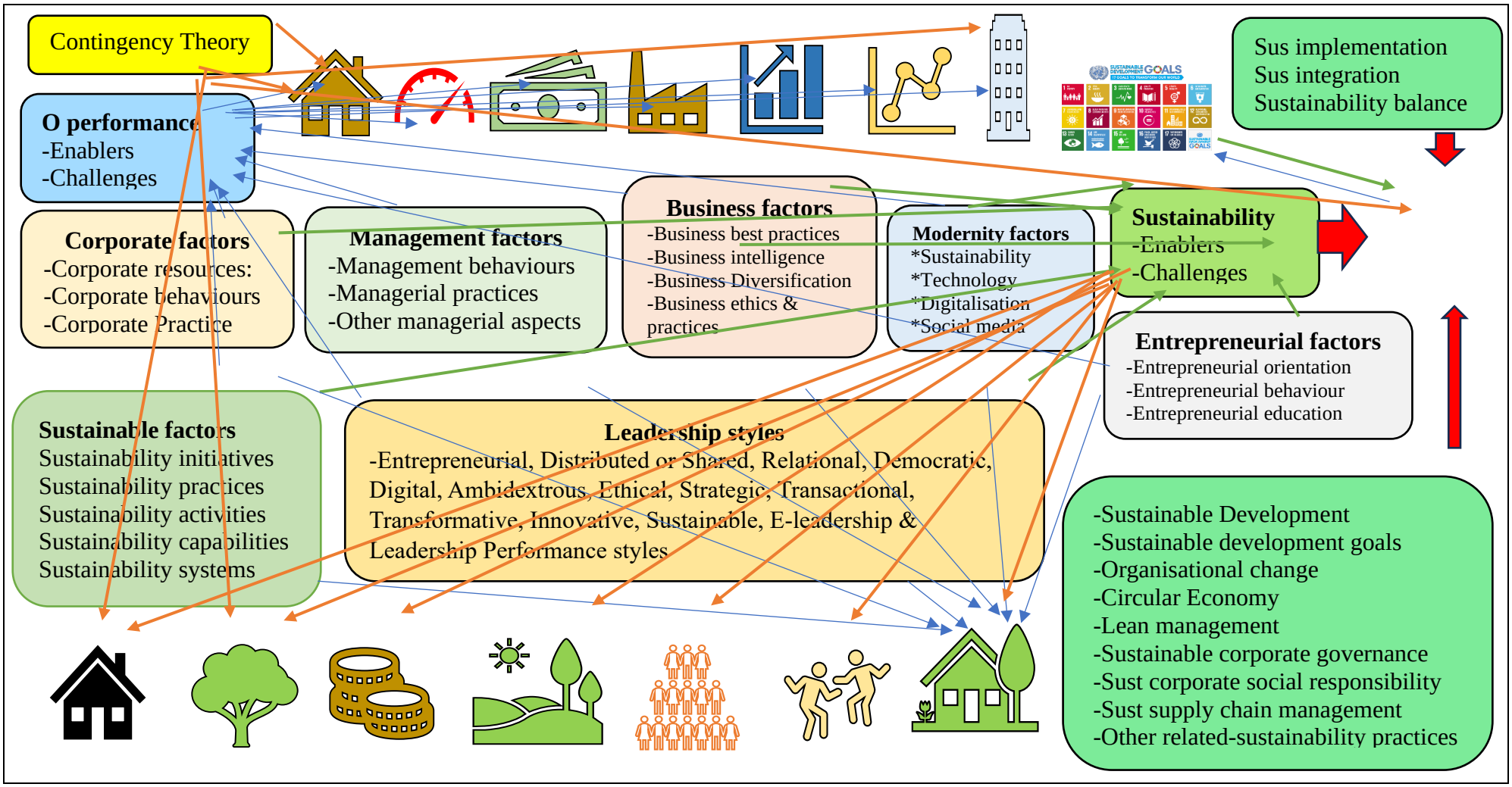
Source: Author's own

The interpretation of Figure: 5.5 is provided above the figure in Section 5.7.2. The statements formulated under Section 5.7.2 are supported by the contingency theory. The above model combined two contingency theories discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, such as: CT of sustainability and CT of SMEs.

5.7.3 Business model for sustainable small and medium enterprises performance

Figure 5.6 is the third model developed and is summarised as follows: This model acknowledges sustainability and OP of SMEs in general and SA SMEs in particular. These SMEs were challenged by corporate, business, managerial, entrepreneurial, modernity, leadership, and sustainable factors which affect the achievement of SMEs' environment, social, economic, and cultural sustainability, and the same time the achievement of financial, growth, market, and operational performance dimensions. But if they manage these factors intelligently, they can turn them into their advantages by converting them into enablers leading to the achievement of social, economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability, as well as productivity, profitability competitiveness and expansion. For its feasibility each factor should be linked to each sustainability perspective. Sustainable SMEs should integrate SDGs into their daily performance activities. Moreover, they should also implement SDGs.

Figure: 5.6: Business model for sustainable small and medium enterprises' performance



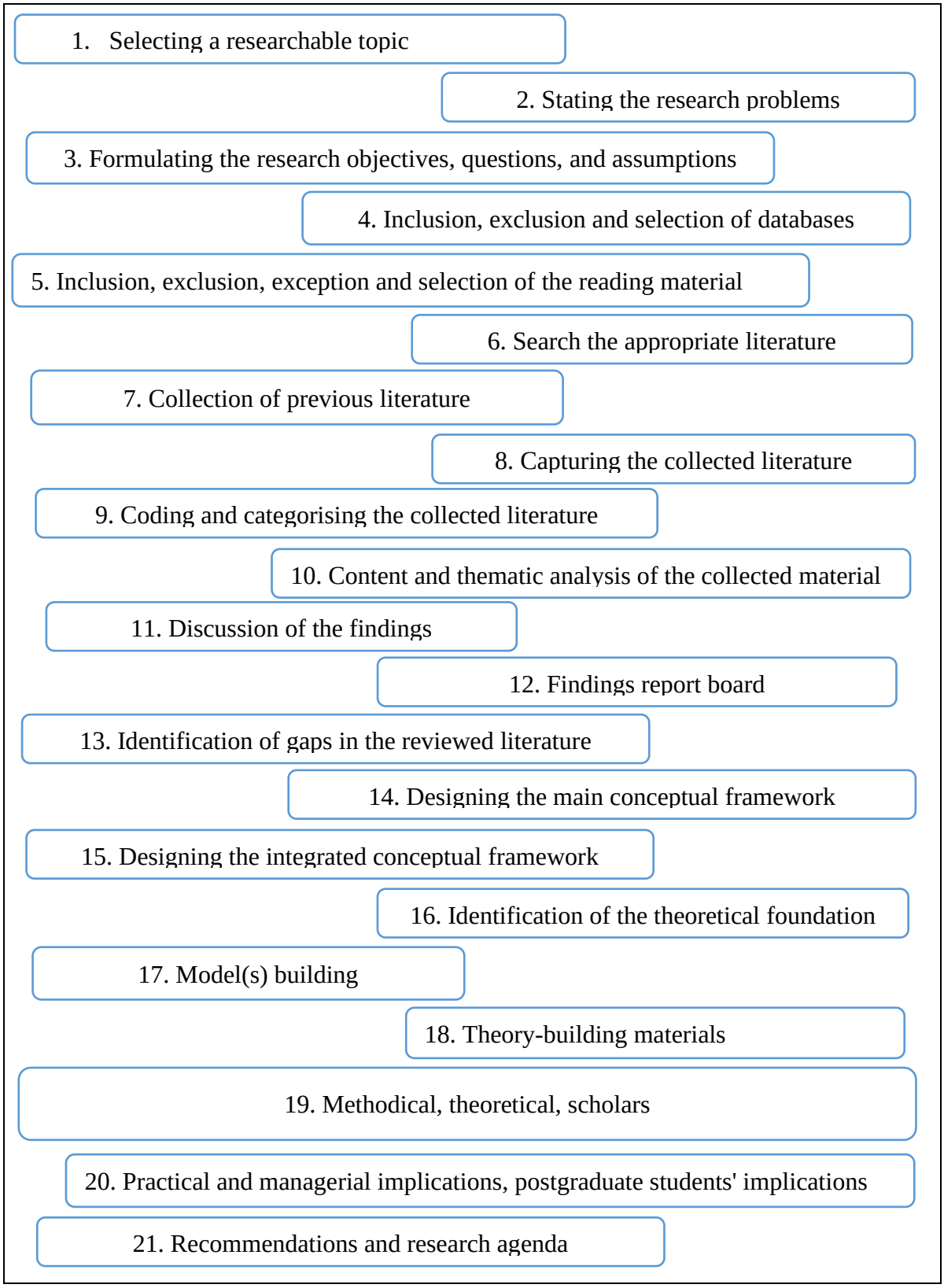
Source: Author's own

The interpretation of Figure: 5.6 has been provided above the figure in Section 5.7.3. The contingency theory supports the statements formulated in Section 5.7.3. The above model and combined three contingency theories discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, such as CT of OP, CT of sustainability and CT of SMEs.

5.8 METHODICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This section discusses the methodical contribution of this study. This study provides comprehensive guidelines for the literature review methodology for those who would like to undertake such a study in the future. The below guidelines might be helpful to postgraduate students who wish to conduct their studies by using ILR as the sole research method for their master's and/ or theses. The steps to follow are enumerated in the figure below:

Figure 5.7: Consecutive steps for integrative literature review



Source: Author's own

Figure 5.7 displays 21 consecutive steps to follow for the successful application of ILR in any kind of study.

5.9 PRACTICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

As a qualitative study, the practical and managerial implications in this section are related to the understanding of the two phenomena under study, namely sustainability and OP, their components and the understanding of the findings. This was a descriptive study, and the practical and managerial implications are based on the description of the findings. As an interpretive study, the practical and managerial implications are the interpretation of the discussions on the orientation of the study from **Chapter 1** and the phenomena components in **Chapter 2.** Further, these were derived from the findings of the reviewed and analysed literature in this study, as well as the discussion and interpretation. In short, the practical and managerial implications were placed in the context of the understanding, description, discussions, and interpretations of the whole study.

In this study, given that there was an exhaustive number of literature publications that were reviewed (to the point of saturation), no other studies were used to support the findings and implication statements in this section. Numerous figures were provided in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 in an attempt to synthesise the insight and understandings observed in the study. Therefore, this chapter on its own is considered an adequate contribution of the study.

5.9.1 Practical and managerial implications of the corporate factors for organisational performance achievement

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications of the corporate factors for OP achievements. The management team of an organisation should set achievable goals for the organisation. They must ensure that not only goals are linked to each OP dimension to enable its achievements, but also goals are achieved at the four levels of the organisation, at the financial, operational, market and growth performance levels. Management needs to have knowledge of operative management to avoid SME failure.

5.9.2 Practical and managerial implications of the corporate factors for sustainability achievement

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications of the corporate factors to achieve sustainability. Managers must identify the required resources for good functioning of their companies.

5.9.3 Practical and managerial implications of the management factors for organisational performance achievement

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications of the management factors for OP achievement. Management needs to prevent the ineffectiveness of a management system in an attempt to drive SMEs to become sustainable.

5.9.4 Practical and managerial implications of the leadership factors for organisational performance achievement

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications of the leadership factors for OP achievement. Regarding the leadership style, managers should choose not only one leadership style but more than one that would be suitable for a company's success.

5.9.5 Practical and managerial implications of the sustainable factors for organisational performance achievement

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications of the sustainable factors for OP achievement. In referring to Chapter 2. Figure 2.2 on OPP, it is assumed to be the first OP dimension requiring sustainability as it exposes not only the companies but also the surrounding community to ecological dangers generated by their activities from smoke and noise. Thus, SME managers should care about environment sustainability and operational performance. The management team should set goals that fit the agenda of the SGDs and ensure that they are achieved accordingly. For an organisation to operate in a contemporary and sustainable manner, management should set OGs that correspond to the SDGs. The interconnection and interdependence between SDGs and OGs should be ensured by management.

5.9.6 Practical and managerial implications of the phases for sustainability implementation in organisational performance

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications for sustainability implementation in OP. Management must maintain a sustainable performance of their business. For its feasibility they should consider the four sustainability perspectives. At the operational level, they should implement environmental sustainability practices.

5.9.7 Practical and managerial implications of the steps for sustainability integration into organisational performance

This section discusses the steps of practical and managerial implications for sustainability integration into OP. The managerial people should integrate the four sustainability dimensions into the overall performance of their enterprises. To ensure that sustainability is well implemented in SMEs, the management of those companies should first, integrate environmental sustainability into OPP for multiple possible purposes. For example, maintaining the business environment and producing sustainable products. Second, the integration of economic sustainability into FP would help managers with expenses regarding machine maintenance, The integration of cultural sustainability into production by managers would lead to sustainable production, meaning managers should ensure that the companies produce products suitable for the culture of their customers to keep the value of the community.

5.9.8 Practical and managerial implications of the approaches for sustainability balance in organisational performance

This section discusses the practical and managerial implications of the approaches for sustainability balance in OP. Regarding approaches for sustainability balance in OP, managers should ensure all sustainability dimensions when dealing with any OP perspective. For example, when dealing with financial performance, mangers will need to identify the inputs of ecological, economic, social, and cultural for the achievement of financial performance or any of its components. As an illustration, balancing the four sustainability pillars in the return on investments (ROI) would require managers to use such return on the investment or

reinvestment in the business environment (such as office, pollution prevention, water reserves, and so on). Likewise, managers should invest in industrial production and the development of cooperative and industrial production. In addition, managers should ensure investing in people's care and safety in the company, and in the same way, in cultural events for the happiness of employees and surrounding communities. The following section explains the research agenda for future studies of SMEs.

5.10 RESEARCH AGENDA FOR FUTURE STUDIES ON SOUTH AFRICAN SMES

Sustainability integration should be considered as the starting point of sustainability in an organisation. Failing sustainability integration is considered as the failure of sustainability implementation and balance. Future research in SA SME performance and/ or sustainability should focus on the gaps identified in each factor of sustainability and OP components and the reviewed literature. For the growing research related to OP, the missed OP components should be the focus for future studies.

The figures of the research agendas are presented in Chapter 6 in the section discussing the recommendations of the study (Section 6.6). In line with the above discussions regarding the research agenda, the next section discusses the implications for academics and postgraduate students.

5.11 ACADEMICS AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' IMPLICATIONS

The academic and postgraduate students' implications in this section are derived from the identified gaps in the reviewed literature on SA SMEs. The research agenda settled in this study offers the opportunity to academics and postgraduate students in SA to build and grow the subject field, as well as to enrich the literature regarding the SME sector. Thus, the study calls for the consideration of the proposed research agenda by scholars who are willing to conduct research on the topic related to OP and/ or sustainability in SA SMEs in the future. In addition, although the comprehensive research agenda provided in this study concerns particularly the

SMEs operating in SA, international academics and postgraduate students (outside of SA) might consider this opportunity to fill these research gaps.

Furthermore, in the context of knowledge building, three frameworks were developed, namely categorical-analytical framework, integrated conceptual framework and contextual SA SME framework, likewise, three business models including successful SMEs' performance model, successful SMEs' sustainability model and sustainable SMEs' performance model were built. In addition to this, an inclusive guideline for sustainability-use was provided, and moreover novel concepts and theories were developed for use by potential scholars and student researchers in their future studies. Indeed, these archetypes might be used by adopting either or both a quantitative and qualitative approach. In quantitative studies the researchers will be able to develop hypotheses that can be tested, while the adoption of qualitative studies will allow not only for the deep understanding of these structures but will give researchers the opportunity to identify possible theories to be extended from the existing theories or to develop novel theories.

5.12 SUMMARY

This chapter offers all the benefits of using ILR. The chapter revealed that from the findings generated from the literature review, some knowledge was constructed. In fact, only the gaps of SA SMEs were identified in the literature while the integrated categorical-conceptual framework combining multiple categories and concepts generated from the findings was designed. Likewise, a contextual framework was developed based on the findings only of SA SMEs. Moreover, novel theories grounded on the theoretical foundation of this study and the findings were built in line with those that were summarised in the two constructed frameworks. From the theories, three models were developed in line with the findings and related research questions of this study. In addition, the methodical contributions, practical and managerial implications, as well as implications for academics and postgraduate students are provided. The next chapter provides recommendations, areas for future research and the conclusions.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESEARCH AGENDA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of the study in Section 6.2. A summary of all the chapters is provided in Section 6.3. The recommendations in line with RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5 are presented in Section 6.4. The recommendations for all the research questions are in Section 6.5. The areas for future research are provided in Section 6.6. The conclusion of the study was presented in Section 6.7.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This section is a summary of the study. This study explored sustainability and OP of South African SMEs. The title of the study was envisioned to highlight sustainability and OP can be achieved for sustainable performance of SA SMEs, and those located globally.

The study was premised on the problem that, first, there is existing literature proclaiming OP and sustainability achievements are influenced by factors, specifically internal and external. which so far were unknown as they have not been published in the literature reviewed. In short, there is no study that clearly listed all enablers facilitating OP and sustainability successes in SMEs and SA SMEs. Similarly, and second, previous studies confirmed that the achievement of OP and sustainability was challenged by internal and external factors that have remained unidentified. In other words, no study has provided all-embracing challenges impeding OP and sustainability achievements especially, when referring to SMEs in general and particularly in the context of SA.

Third, previous research acknowledged the difficulties of integrating sustainability into organisations. It was assumed that this could be due to the lack of well-established steps to

follow for such an integration task, particularly in the SME sector. So far, no study on the consecutive steps of sustainability integration into OP has been conducted in SMEs, regardless of their location. Fourth, challenges of sustainability implementation in organisations have been affirmed and the sequential implementation phases have not been mentioned in the preceding investigations in SMEs and SA SMEs. Finally, although acknowledging that achieving sustainable equilibrium is challenging, approaches to reach such a balance are still not offered by previous researchers.

Considering the above difficulties, the following objectives were investigated through a literature review:

- Scrutinising the enablers that facilitate the attainment of sustainability in the OP of SMEs in general and South African SMEs in particular.
- Inspecting the challenges that impede the attainment of sustainability and OP in SMEs in general and South African SMEs in particular.
- Studying the steps for incorporating sustainability into OP of SMEs in general and South African SMEs in particular.
- Exploring the phases for implementing sustainability in OP of SMEs in general and South African SMEs in particular, focusing on the literature review.
- Investigating the approaches for achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability in the OP of SMEs in general and South African SMEs in particular, by reviewing the existing literature.

6.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

This section provides a summary of each chapter of this study, starting with a summary of Chapter 1.

6.3.1 Summary of Chapter 1: Introduction, background information and orientation of the study

This section summarises Chapter 1, Introduction, background information and orientation of the study. The chapter was structured as follows:

Section 1.1 was the introduction of the study. Section 1.2 focused on the background information of the study which was presented in five sections. Section 1.2.1 provided the background information on OP achievement. Section 1.2.2 provided the background information on sustainability achievement. The background information on sustainability implementation in OP was provided in Section 1.2.3. Sustainability integration in OP was the background information provided in Section 1.2.4**.** Section 1.2.5 was the background information on the OP balance in OP.

Section 1.3 focused on the context of the study. Section 1.3.1 was an overview of South Africa, followed by SA and OP in Section 1.3.2, then SA and sustainability in Section 1.3.3. Section 1.3.4 described SMEs. Section 1.3.5 discussed SMEs and OP, Section 1.3.6 discussed SME sustainability, followed by SA SMEs in Section 1.3.7, SA SME performance in Section 1.3.8, and SA SME sustainability in Section 1.3.9.

In Section 1.4 stated that the research problem was related to the background information. The research purpose linked to the title of the study was formulated in Section 1.5. Section 1.6 set the research objectives in line with the research problems. The research questions related to the research objectives were formulated in Section 1.7. Section 1.8. presented the articulated research assumptions following the research questions.

The rationale of the study was presented in Section 1.9 as follows: Section 1.9.1 provided the motive for choosing OP in this study. Section 1.9.2 justified the motive for the choice of the OP dimensions. Section 1.9.3 explained the reason for selecting sustainability. The reason why sustainability dimensions were chosen was justified in Section 1.9.4. The motive for sustainability issues was provided in Section 1.9.5. The motivation for sustainability integration was offered in Section 1.9.6. The reason for selecting sustainability implementation was mentioned in Section 1.9.7. The purpose of preferring a sustainability balance was stated in Section 1.9.8. The choice of SMEs was justified in Section 1.9.9. Section 1.9.10 explained why SA was chosen in this study, and the selection of the ILR was mentioned in Section 1.9.11.

The significance of the study was provided in Section 1.10, followed by the demarcation of the study in Section 1.11, and the definitions of key terms in Section 1.12. Finally, the chapter layout was provided in Section 1.13. The next section is a summary of Chapter 2.

6.3.2 Summary of Chapter 2: Phenomenal components and theoretical foundation

This section is a summary of Chapter 2 of this study. This chapter focused on the phenomenal components and theoretical foundation. The following was the structure of Chapter 2. Section 2.1 was the introduction. Section 2.2 focused on organisational performance including financial, operational, market and growth performance. Section 2.2.1 listed the financial performance (FP) components. Section 2.2.2 itemised the operational performance (OPP) components. Section 2.2.3 enumerated market performance (MP) components. Section 2.2.4 presented the growth performance (GP) components.

Section 2.3 focused on environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability. Section 2.3.1 itemised environmental (ES) components. Section 2.3.2 detailed the economic sustainability (ECS) components. Section 2.3.3 listed the social sustainability (SS) components. Section 2.3.4 enumerated the cultural sustainability (CS) components. The findings of the study were interpreted in line with these components.

Section 2.4 discusses the theoretical foundation of the study. Theory of knowledge was debated in Section 2.4.1. The theory of knowledge was used as a guide to conduct the ILR. The contingency theory was discussed in Section 2.4.2. Contingency theory was used as a guide for new theory-building. In line with the key terms of the study, the contingency theory was separated into CT of OP in Section 2.4.3, followed by CT of sustainability in Section 2.4.4 and CT of SMEs in Section 2.4.5. Section 2.5 was the summary of the chapter. Chapter 3 is summarised in the following section.

6.3.3 Summary of Chapter 3: Research methodology

This section summarises Chapter 3 of this study. This chapter discussed the overall process and practices of the research methodology adopted in this study. The chapter was structured as follows:

Section 3.2, the research paradigm discussed the existing research paradigms and selected two of them, interpretivism and constructivism. The interpretivism paradigm helped understand and interpret the findings of the literature review, while the constructivism paradigm assisted in

constructing frameworks, theories, and models from the understanding of the findings of the reviewed literature. Section 3.3 discussed the available research approaches. The qualitative research approach was selected. This was a guide for the entire process of the study, from the problem statement to the conclusion, the research agenda.

Section 3.4 focused on the design. After discussing embedded, exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive research designs, the exploratory design was selected to explore sustainability and OP phenomena in generic SMEs and SA SMEs with its related research objectives and questions using a literature review. The choice of the descriptive design described and explored sustainability and OP phenomena in generic SMEs and SA SMEs. Section 3.5 described the research choice of this study. After debating multi-methods, mixed methods and mono method, the mono method was selected for the study as it dealt with ILR only. Section 3.6 discussed the research time horizon, which included cross-sectional and longitudinal horizons. This study was longitudinal as it collected data from 2017 to 2024. Section 3.7 defined the research area, i.e. Management, which included business and business management. But to align with the topic of sustainability and OP of SMEs, this study crossed the line to embrace sustainable development, performance, and entrepreneurial areas. The literature review used collected and analysed publications from the following subject fields: management, business, business management, entrepreneurship, organisations, small enterprises, performance, and sustainable development.

The research method was discussed in Section 3.8. After discussing the available qualitative research methods, the literature review was selected as the study dealt with the novel contemporary subject of sustainability. In this section, the eligibility criteria were exclusion, inclusion, extraction, exception, and selection criteria applied in this study. Section 3.9 focused on the literature collection technique, which was a desk review or desk search. Section 3.10 targeted the literature publications that were to be collected. This section discussed the navigation of the Wits library e-resources, the navigation of this library from A to Z, the literature selection process, the census enquiry, the question of attaining the highest accuracy, the cross-section of the literature, the target literature per Group A which regarded the collection of literature from the database, while Group B was the collection of literature according to the type of documents.

Section 3.11 discussed literature sampling and collection process which framed the sampling per key-topic terms, per purposive literature publication, reading material or journals. This section discussed the literature search and collection, which included the content terms used to search the literature. This section mentioned the 5000 literature publications collected for this study. Section 3.12 discussed the management of the literature and its analysis processs, which included manual storage, preparation, manual description, manual transcription, manual coding, manual categorisation, manual puzzling, fragmentation, condensation, grouping, masquerading, saturation, selection, presentation, abstraction, analysis, visual representation of the literature, as well as the presentation and visual representation of the findings of the reviewed literature.

Section 3.13 was the approach for the interpretation of the literature findings in the context of sustainability and OP dimensions and components. Section 3.14 was the identification of the gaps in the literature; it was suggested that the gap be only for SA SME and not the generic SMEs reviewed in the literature. Section 3.15 was the research agenda creäted from the gaps identified in the literature on SA SMEs.

The accuracy of the findings was assessed in Section 3.16; reliability and validity were evaluated in Section 3.17**.** Section 3.17.1 discussed reliability, Section 3.17.2 debated validity, Section 3.17.3 focused on credibility, Section 3.17.4 dealt with transferability**,** Section 3.17.5 conversed about confirmability, and Section 3.17.6 debated the dependability of the study and its findings. Section 3.18 focused on the ethical considerations. The advantages of the ILR were offered in Section 3.19. Section 3.20 addressed the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter ended with a summary in Section 3.21. Chapter 4 is summarised in the next section.

6.3.4 Summary of Chapter 4: Findings, literature analysis and discussions

This section offered a summary of Chapter 4 included the findings, literature analysis and discussions. Section 4.1 introduced the chapter. Section 4.2 presented the collected data. The collected literature related to **RQ1** and **RQ2** was presented in Section 4.2.1, while the collected literature of **RQ3, RQ4,** and **RQ5** was displayed in the table 4.11 in Section 4.2.2.

The selected literature was tabulated in Section 4.2.3. All the literature that did not fall into the SME industry or SA SMEs was removed. The literature of both SMEs and SA SMEs were

exhibited in Section 4.2.4. Section 4.2.5 presented the literature on SA SMEs only. The collected data were analysed using content analysis in Section 4.3 and presented in charts. Section 4.3.1 presented the content analysis of the literature related to **RQ1** and **RQ2.** Section 4.3.2. presented the content analysis for the literature related to **RQ3, RQ4** and **RQ5.** Section 4.3.3 presented the content analysis for the extracted and selected literature. Section 4.3.4 presented the content analysis for both SMEs and SA SME literature, while Section 4.3.5 focused on the contextual analysis only of SA SME literature. Section 4.4 presented the thematic analysis; in Section 4.4.1 the thematic analysis for the collected literature related to **RQ1** and **RQ2,** and Section 4.4.2 was the thematic analysis for **RQ3**, **RQ4** and **RQ5**.

Section 4.5 discussed the findings regarding Research Question **RQ1a** on the enablers of OP achievement. The discussions revealed corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity and sustainable factors were the enablers of OP achievement of SMEs and SA SMEs. In general, the findings revealed OP and sustainability achievement were led by ***organisational or corporate factors*** (corporate resources, behaviours, and practices), ***managerial factors*** (managerial behaviours, practices, and other managerial factors), ***business factors*** (generic business diversification, business models, business advices and business advisors, as well as business success and business owners' success), ***entrepreneurial factors*** (entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial behaviours, and entrepreneurial education, ***leadership factors*** including leadership aspects, such as key leadership determinants and ***leadership styles*** (leadership performance, entrepreneurial leadership, distributed or shared leadership, relational leadership, democratic leadership, e-leadership, ambidextrous leadership, digital leadership, sustainable leadership, ethical leadership, innovation or innovative leadership, transactional leadership, transformative leadership and transformational leadership, as well as strategic leadership and strategic leaders), ***modernity factors*** (technology, internet, digitalisation and social media), and sustainable factors.

Section 4.6 debated the results associated with Research Question **RQ1b** on the enablers of sustainability attainment, which revealed that corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity and sustainable factors were also the enablers of sustainability achievement in SMEs and SA SMEs.

Section 4.7 discussed the findings of Research Question R**Q2a** on the challenges of OP achievement. It was discovered that corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial,

leadership, modernity and sustainable factors were the challenges that obstructed OP achievement in SMEs and SA SMEs. Likewise, Section 4.8 argued the outcomes relative to Research Question **RQ2b** on the challenges of sustainability fulfilment, which exposed that corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity and sustainable factors were also challenges faced by SMEs globally and SA SMEs in achieving sustainability.

Section 4.9 discussed the findings regarding Research Question **RQ3** that focused on sustainability implementation in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs. It was revealed that ***sustainable development (SD), sustainable development goals (SDGs), organisational changes (OC), circular economy (CE), lean management (LM), sustainable corporate governance (SCG), sustainable corporate responsibility (SCR), sustainable supply chain management (SSCM)*** and other ***related sustainability practices*** were implemented in SMEs operating globally Some of these were implemented in SA SMEs. However, SDGs, OC, LM and SCG were not implemented in SA SMEs. Similarly, no literature addressed the phases to be followed for the implementation of sustainability in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Section 4.10 discussed the results relative to Research Question **RQ4,** based on the sustainability integration steps into the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs. The findings revealed that manifold sustainability aspects were integrated into the OP of SMEs in the world. Yet, in SA SMEs, only ***green supply chain management (GSCM)*** was found to be integrated into OP. However, no study revealed steps for integrating sustainability into the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs.

Section 4.11 was dedicated to the discussions of the findings associated with Research Question **RQ5** concerning sustainability balance approaches in the OP of SMEs and SA SMEs. Although the findings revealed some equilibrium of ***TBL approaches, sustainability approach, sustainability dimensions, sustainability aspects, sustainability practices and sustainability growth*** in SMEs, no literature mentioned or revealed the equilibrium between sustainability components in SA SMEs.

Section 4.12 was the summary of the chapter. The next section provides a summary of Chapter 5.

6.3.5 Summary of Chapter 5: Knowledge building and contributions of the study

This section provides a summary of Chapter 5 of the knowledge building and contribution of the study. The following was the structure of the chapter.

This chapter has a brief introduction in Section 5.1. Followed by an overview of knowledge building in Section 5.2. Section 5.3 used multiple figures to present the identified gaps in the reviewed literature on SA SMEs. The gaps identified were of corporate, managerial, business, entrepreneurial, leadership, modernity and sustainable factors found as enablers and challenges of OP and sustainability in SA SMEs. The gaps identified were of sustainability implementation, integration, and balance in SA SMEs. Section 5.4 presented the integrated categorical-conceptual framework. The design was the illustration of the overview of this study. It was a combination of the research objectives and questions, as well as the generated categories from the findings related to **RQ1 and RQ2**, and the concepts generated from the findings related to **RQ3**, **RQ4** and **RQ5**. The section identified the existing links amongst categories among concepts, and between categories and concepts. Section 5.5 exhibited the contextual framework based on the findings of SA SME literature only.

Section 5.6 focused on theory-building. Three theories were built grounded on the findings. CT of successful SME performance was built from the findings related to enablers and challenges of OP generic SMEs and SA SMEs. CT of successful SME sustainability was built in line with the findings of enablers and challenges of sustainability in generic SMEs and SA SMEs. CT of sustainable SME performance was founded on the combination of all the findings related to research, including sustainability implementation, integration, and balance. In line with theories, three corresponding models were presented in Section 5.7, namely the business model of successful SME performance, the business model for successful SME sustainability and the business model for sustainable SME performance.

The methodical contributions were in Section 5.8. Practical and managerial implications were provided in Section 5.9. A briefing of the research agenda was mentioned in Section 5.10. Section 5.11 was the academic and postgraduate students' implications, and Section 5.12 was the summary of the chapter.

The recommendations related to **RQ3, RQ4**, and **RQ5** are presented in the next section, along with a summary of the overall findings presented below.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATIVE TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS 3, 4, AND 5

This section provides the recommendations of the study in line with Research Questions **RQ3. RQ4** and **RQ5**. In line with the findings and the gaps identified in the reviewed literature of this study, some recommendations were described in this section of some guidelines and a research agenda. The next section are the guidelines for sustainability integration, implementation, and balance in OP.

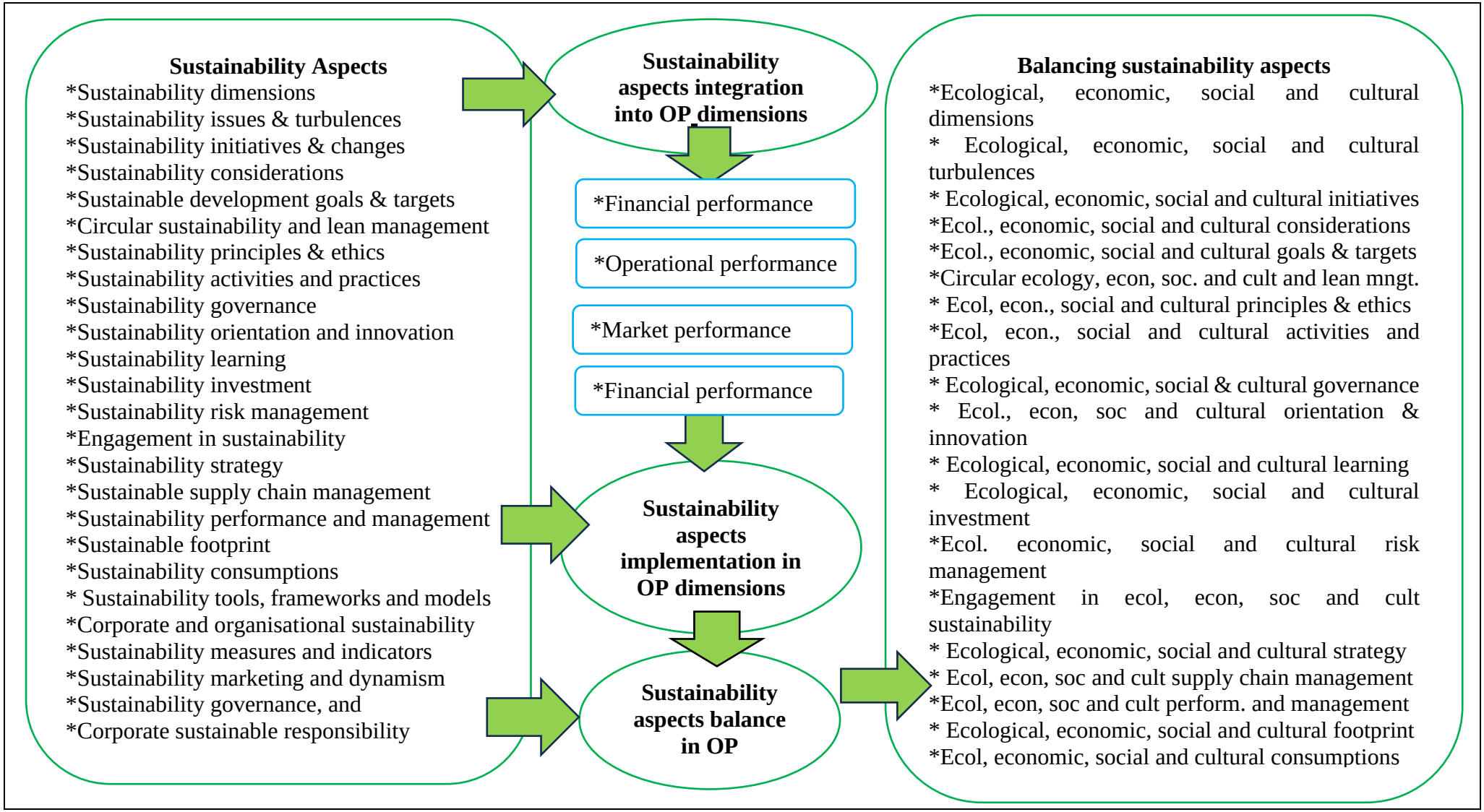
Proposed guidelines for sustainability integration, implementation, and balance in OP.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, **RQ3. RQ4** and **RQ5** were not sufficiently covered by the findings of the literature review as none of the reviewed studies provided phases and steps of sustainability integration, implementation, and balance in OP. Figure 6.1 (below) offers some guidelines for its feasibility.

This section describes some precise recommendations to academics and practitioners in need of topics for further investigation. This study suggests that academic and postgraduate students select from any of the topics below, the subject to be studied, then conduct the study, and collect literature related to the subject and topic There were many recommendations grounded on the gaps identified in the reviewed literature of SMEs in general, such as to integrate sustainability not only at the operational level as they do, but also seek strategies of sustainability integration into the financial market and growth performance.

In SA, sustainability should be incorporated into SA SMEs in general and particularly into the overall OP including financial, operational, market and growth performance dimensions.

Figure 6.1: Proposed guideline for sustainability integration, implementation, and balance



Source: Author's own

Figure 6.1 exhibits how sustainability could be integrated into the OP dimensions, then implemented within this performance perspective, and then balanced. The description of this design was provided above the figure 6.1. The figure encompasses some sustainability aspects generated from the findings of the reviewed literature. Further recommendations for this study involved various research agendas as proposed in the next section.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATIVE TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS: 1 AND 2

Taken from the identified gaps in the reviewed literature as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.3, this section presents the proposed agenda. In this section the agenda related to corporate, business, management, entrepreneurship, leadership styles, modernism and sustainability aspects were presented for future research of corporate factors in SA SMEs.

6.5.1 Research agenda about the organisation/corporate South African small and medium enterprises SME performance or sustainability

This study proposes various agenda based on the findings. The table below lists the areas that require investigations in the future depending on the researcher' s interest.

Table 6.1: Research agenda frame

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Context of the study
Agenda relative to corporate factors	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to managerial factors	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to business factors	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.

Agenda relative to entrepreneurial factors Agenda relative to leadership factors	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to modernity factors	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to sustainable factors	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to the implementation of sustainability aspects	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to the integration of sustainability aspects	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.
Agenda relative to the balance of sustainability aspects	Depending on the research questions formulated by the researcher	SMEs / or any company de depending on the researcher' s interest.

Table 6.1 shows the areas that need the agenda proposal for future research.

The tables below suggest the agenda for future research of organisational or corporate factors in SA SMEs.

A series of agendas was proposed for future research on corporate resources, behaviours, capabilities, networking, and organisational learning. The table below exhibits the agenda for research on corporate resources.

Table 6.2: Research agenda on organisational or corporate resources in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SME about: **financial resources** -Working capital -Capital structure -Tax structure …… **Physical resources** -Leveraging resources -Alter resources …… **Human resources** -Social capital -HR practices -HR outsourcing ……. **Other resources** -Perception -Intellectual capital -Talent management	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between corporate resources and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of corporate resources in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of corporate resources to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impact of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Figure 6.2 above shows the aspects of financial resources, physical resources, human resources, and other resources that need to be included in future studies on SA SMEs. Various research methods are proposed for achieving the expected results. The next figure outlines the research agenda relative to organisational or corporate behaviours for future research on corporate behaviours.

Table 6.3: Research agenda on organisational or corporate behaviours in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Corporate attitude -Corporate ambidexterity	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between corporate behaviours and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of corporate behaviours in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of corporate behaviours to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.3 demonstrates the agenda for future research. Following the contents of the above table, corporate attitude, ambidexterity, and engagement were the proposed corporate behaviour aspects that should be considered in SA SME research. The outline for future research on corporate capabilities in SA SMEs is presented in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Research agenda on organisational or corporate capabilities in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Relationship capabilities -Market capability -Technological capability -Entrepreneurial capability -Management capabilities -Digital platform capability	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between corporate capabilities factors and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of corporate capabilities factors in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

-Dynamic marketing capabilities -IT capabilities -Competitive capability -Customer involvement capability -Involvement capabilities -Pricing capability -Operational capability -International capabilities -Alliance management capability -Capability maturity model -Market knowledge capability -Top management capabilities -Knowledge sharing capabilities -Customer involvement capability -Customer bonding capability -Knowledge management capabilities		
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of corporate capability factors to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.4 above exhibits the identified corporate capabilities aspects to be covered by SA SME future studies. The three research methods were also presented. Table 6.5 presents the research agenda for future corporate networking topics in SA SMEs.

Table 6.5 Research agenda on organisational or corporate networking in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	**Proposed research methods**	**Expected results**
Research on SA SMEs about: -Internationalisation	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between corporate networking factors and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

-Inter-organisational networks -International networking -International new ventures' (INVs) networking -Inter-organisational collaboration -Network resources -Cross-border e-commerce -International e-commerce -Foreign business relationships -Regional integration -Network partners -Network embeddedness -Network diffusion -Horizontal and vertical connectedness -Alliance management -Network competence -Entrepreneurial network -Corporate network -Social networks	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of corporate networking factors in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of corporate networking factors to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Corporate networking aspects that require the attention of academics and postgraduate students for further investigation on SA SMEs are shown in the above Table 6.5. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods were proposed for the expected findings. The research agenda related to innovation and organisational learning aspects is shown in the following table.

Table 6.6: Research agenda on innovation and organisational learning aspects in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Creativity -Employee creativity -Employee innovation -Innovation model -Innovation strategy -Entrepreneurial innovativeness -Financial innovation -Innovation dimensions -Innovation activity -Innovation adoption -Innovation culture -Innovation enhancement -Exploration and exploitation of opportunities	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between innovation / organisational learning and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of innovation / organisational learning in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of innovation / organisational learning to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.6 exhibits the agenda for future research on innovation creativity and organisational learning. Potential studies could use the proposed research methods to reach desirable results. In addition, the next section presents the research agenda for management investigations in SA SMEs.

6.5.2 Research agenda about the management of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

This section presents the research agenda for future studies on the management of South African small and medium enterprises (SA SME) performance or sustainability. The figure below gives an idea of how future research might be conducted.

Table 6.7: Research agenda on managerial behaviours in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Management support -Management personality -Managerial capacity -Managerial external capabilities -Managerial innovation capacity -Top management's commitment	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between managerial behaviours and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of managerial behaviours in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of managerial behaviours to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.7 displays the agenda for future research on managerial behaviours in SA SMEs. Each method is proposed with its respective expected results. Moreover, the following table is the agenda for planning and strategy research in SA SMEs.

Table 6.8: Research agenda on planning and strategy aspects in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	**Proposed research methods**	**Expected results**
Research on SA SMEs about: -Strategic actions -Strategic initiatives -Sustainable corporate strategy -Market-driven strategies	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between planning/ strategy aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of planning/ strategy aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of planning / strategy aspects to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.8 shown above, identifies the agenda and research methods that might be followed to conduct studies on planning and strategy aspects in SA SMEs. Supply chain management and total quality management were the aspects of the following agenda.

Table 6.9: Research agenda on supply chain management and total quality management aspects in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: - SCM practices -SCM strategy -Quality management stages -Quality management -TQM -TQM adoption -TQM practices -TQM model -TQM tools	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between SCM/ TQM and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of SCM/ TQM in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of SCM/ TQM to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.9 is the agenda for proposed research on supply chain management and total quality management. Research methods are proposed for potential researchers to find desirable findings. The next table exhibits the research agenda proposed for studies related to marketing and human resources management.

Table 6.10: Research agenda on marketing and human resources management aspects in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Marketing capabilities -Marketing performance -Green HRM	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between marketing / HRM aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of marketing / HRM aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of marketing / HRM aspects OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.10 describes the research ideas for future investigation in SA SMEs. This agenda could cover marketing and human resources management. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods can be used depending on the purpose of the study, as shown in the table. Furthermore, the agenda for accounting and management accounting is proposed in the following table.

Table 6.11: Research agenda on accounting and management accounting aspects in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: - Accounting information systems -Cash flow - Management of economic capitals -Management of financial resources -Management accounting - MAC information -MAC innovation capability -Strategic MAC -MAC system -MAC services -MAC methods	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between accounting / MAC aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of accounting / MAC aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of accounting / MAC aspects OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.11 shows some aspects of accounting and management accounting that could be covered by researchers in the future. The agenda suggests the use of any research method for obtaining particular results. In addition, the research agenda for other managerial aspects is proposed in the table below.

Table 6.12: Research agenda on other management aspects in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Management control systems -Managerial relationships -Management orientation -Strategic management	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between other management aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of other management aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of other management aspects OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.12 proposes the agenda of other managerial aspects, such as management control systems, managerial relationships, management orientation, and strategic management research to be conducted in SA SMEs. Depending on the expectation of the findings, various methods, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods can be implemented. In the following section, the agenda for business research in SA SMEs is presented.

6.5.3 Research agenda about the business of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

Section 5.3 presents multiple agendas for future research on business and / or sustainability and OP of SA SMEs. These generic agendas include research on business diversification, business models, business ethics and practices, as well as business intelligence. The agenda for business research is outlined in Table 6.13 below:

Table 6.13: Research agenda on business diversification in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Geographic diversification -Product diversification -Innovation diversity -Financing diversification -Gender diversity -Management team diversity -Entrepreneur's experiential diversity	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between business diversification and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of business diversification in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of business diversification to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.13 shows all facets of business diversification for future investigation. The proposed research methods include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, and their respective expected results were also shown. In addition, the following table presents the agenda for business model investigation.

Table 6.14: Research agenda on business model in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Business model -Green business model -International business models -Ambidextrous business model -Business model innovation	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between business model factors and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of business model factors in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of business model factors to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.14 exhibits various aspects of a business model that should be covered by researchers in the future. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods are proposed for achieving the desired outcomes. Moreover, the next table presents the agenda for future research on business ethics and practices.

Table 6.15: Research agenda on business ethics and practices in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Ethical practices -Green business practices -Business advice -Business advisors	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between business ethics and practices factors and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of business ethics and practices factors in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of business ethics and practices factors to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Future research on multiple business ethics and practices is proposed in Table 6.15. Likewise, the expected results with appropriate methods to be implemented are also displayed. The succeeding table outlines the agenda for future research on business intelligence.

Table 6.16: Research agenda on business intelligence in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Business orientation -Business strategy -Green business strategy -Business owners' success -Business incubation -Business incubation process -Business incubators influences	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between business intelligence factors and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of business intelligence factors in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of business intelligence factors to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.16 addresses the agenda for future research covering business intelligence in SA SME literature. The agenda also proposed various research methods and the expected results. The next section discusses the research agenda on entrepreneurship in the SA SME literature.

6.5.4 Research agenda about entrepreneurship of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

This section is related to gaps in the literature discussed in Section 5.3.4. It presents multiple agendas for future research on entrepreneurship and/or sustainability and the OP of SA SMEs. It encompasses research agendas on various aspects of entrepreneurship, such as: entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial behaviours, and entrepreneurial education. The table below shows the content of the agenda about entrepreneurial orientation.

Table 6.17: Research agenda on entrepreneurial orientation in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -International entrepreneurial orientation -Green entrepreneurial orientation -Strategic orientation -Innovation orientation -Learning orientation -Stakeholder orientation -Competitor orientation -Environmental sustainability orientation	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between entrepreneurial orientation and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of entrepreneurial orientation in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of entrepreneurial orientation to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of entrepreneurial factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.17 reveals the aspects of entrepreneurial orientation that need to be in future studies on SA SME. Future research methods are proposed. Besides this, entrepreneurial behaviours are also on the agenda of entrepreneurship as illustrated in the following table.

Table 6.18: Research agenda on entrepreneurial behaviours in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Entrepreneurial behaviours -Strategic entrepreneurship behaviours -Innovative behaviours -Entrepreneurs' improvisational behaviours -Enterprises' employee	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between entrepreneurial behaviours and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of entrepreneurial behaviours in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of entrepreneurial behaviours to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of entrepreneurial factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.18 displays the agenda of entrepreneurial orientation research to be conducted in future on SA SMEs. The agenda recommends using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods to achieve the predicted outcomes. The next table presents the research agenda for entrepreneurial education.

Table 6.19: Research agenda on entrepreneurial education in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Support program -Edu-finance -Entrepreneurial literacy -Technological literacy -Digital literacy -Information literacy competencies -E-literacy -Entrepreneurial learning -Entrepreneurship training	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between entrepreneurial education and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of entrepreneurial education in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of entrepreneurial education to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of entrepreneurial factors on OP and/ or sustainability

Source: Author's own

Table 6.19 outlines the overall research agenda for entrepreneurial education studies on SMEs functioning in SA, which includes the proposed research methods associated with the expected findings. Furthermore, the agenda concerns leadership styles in SA SMEs as presented in the section below.

6.5.5 Research agenda about leadership styles of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

Section 5.3.5 is the agenda for future research on leadership styles in SA SMEs. The agenda encompasses various styles of leadership that need the attention of researchers, the research methods to be used and the expected findings as shown in the table below.

Table 6.20: Research agenda on leadership in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Leadership performance -Distributed or shared leadership -Relational leadership -Democratic leadership -E-leadership -Ambidextrous leadership -Digital leadership -Key leadership determinants -Sustainable leadership -Transactional leadership -Strategic leaders -Leadership commitment	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between leadership styles and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of leadership styles in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of leadership styles to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of leadership factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.20 lists leadership styles for future research on SA SMEs. Qualitative and mixed methods, and quantitative methods are recommended for satisfactory results. However, modernism is another factor in the research agenda, as discussed in the following section.

6.5.6 Research agenda about modernity factors of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

Section 5.3.6 suggests the research agenda for modernity in SA SMEs. The agenda proposal is fourfold, namely technology, internet, digitalisation, and social media research on SA SMEs. The table below, shows the agenda for technology research on SA SMEs.

Table 6.21: Research agenda about technology in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Technological change -Technology adoption technology adoption capabilities -Technological innovation. -Cutting-edge technologie -State-of-the-Art technologies -Cloud computing Technology -Big data analytics -Big data analytics management -Blockchain technology	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between technology aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of technology aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of technology aspects to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.21 outlines technology aspects for future research by adopting quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method approaches for probable outcomes. In addition, the agenda for internet research follows.

Table 6.22: Research agenda about internet in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -E-commerce -International e-commerce -E-commerce -E-business -E-business -E-business innovation -E-business technologies -E-business strategy -E-logistics -E-marketing	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between internet aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of internet aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of internet aspects to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.22 outlines technology aspects that should be considered in the future. Future research should adopt quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method approaches for acceptable probable outcomes. In addition, the agenda for internet research is discussed next.

Table 6.23: Research agenda about digitalisation in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Digital transformation -Digital facilitators -Digital adoption -Digital information -Digital platform -Digital wave -Digital development -Digital business -Digital business management -Digital transformation -Digital media	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between digital aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of digital aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of digital aspects to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.23 ignores the research agenda about digitalisation in SA SMEs that are proposed to academics and postgraduate students for future investigation. The expected results with their respective research methods are also recommended. The next table presents the research agenda for social media.

Table 6.24: Research agenda about social media in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Social media engagement -Social media adoption -Social media use -Facebook and WhatsApp groups	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between social media aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of social media aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of social media aspects to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Figure 6.24 exhibits the contents of the research agenda about social media in SA SMEs. The agenda proposes suitable research methods. The agenda might be useful for postgraduate students and researchers. Furthermore, the research agenda on sustainability-related factors is proposed in the figure below.

6.5.7 Research agenda of the sustainable factors of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

Section 5.3.7 provides the research agenda for sustainable factors in SA SMEs. The table below shows the agenda for technology research on SA SMEs.

Table 6.25: Research agenda on sustainable factors in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Sustainability capabilities -Sustainability innovation -Sustainability practices -Sustainability performance -Sustainable performance -Environmental sustainability performance -Financial performance -Social performance -Sustainable competitive advantage -Green competitive advantage -Green financial management -Environmental management process -Environmental initiatives -Social sustainability -Turbulent environment -Sustainability orientation -Sustainability dynamism -Organisational sustainability -Corporate responsibility -Environmental sustainability risk	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between sustainable aspects and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of sustainable aspects in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of sustainable aspects to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.25 illustrates the research agenda of sustainable aspects to be considered in future research on SA SMEs. Qualitative and mixed methods, and quantitative methods are suggested.

6.5.8 Research agenda about the sustainability implementation of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

This section presents the proposed agenda for future investigation for the implementation of some sustainability aspects listed in Figure 6.26 below.

Table 6.26: Research agenda on sustainable development (SD) and sustainable development goals (SDGs) for implementation in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Sustainability concepts -Sustainable development -Sustainable development practices -Sustainable development analysis -Corporate sustainable development enhancement -Economic development -2030 agenda sustainable -Development goals (SDG) -SDGs framework	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between SD / SDGs aspects implemented and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of SD / SDGs aspects implemented in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of SD / SDGs aspects implemented to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Figure 6.26 presents the agenda for future research on SD and SDGs in SA SMEs. The figure shows that various methods can be used to reach the predicted theories. Figure 6.27 exhibits the research agenda for future investigation on OC and CE.

Table 6.27: Research agenda organisational change (OC) and circular economy (CE) implementation in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Organisational change -Business model changes -Organisational change management -Business model adaptations -CE adoption -CE implementation	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between OC / CE aspects implemented and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of OC / CE aspects implemented in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of OC / CE aspects implemented to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.27 displays the research agenda about OC and CE. The selection of a research method helps to achieve desirable outcomes. The following section represents the lean management research agenda.

Table 6.28: Research agenda about lean management implementation in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Lean management (LM) -Lean practices -Lean management practices -Social lean practices -Technical lean practices -Social lean management -Technical lean management -Lean dynamic performance management systems -Lean–green performance -Lean manufacturing -Lean strategies implementation -Lean-excellence business management -Lean principles	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between lean management aspects implemented and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of between lean management aspects implemented in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of lean management aspects implemented to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

The agenda illustrated in Table 6.28 shows that various aspects of LM can be investigated in the future. The expected results for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods have been established. The following section presents the proposed research agenda on sustainability integration.

6.5.9 Research agenda about the sustainability integration of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

Section 5.3.9 and Table 6.29 show the research agenda for sustainability integration in SA SMEs.

Table 6.29: Research agenda (1) on sustainability integration in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Integration of SDGs -Integration of ecological, social and economic aspects -Integration of sustainable procurement -Integration of ecological accountability -Integration of sustainability principles -Integration of sustainability elements -Integration of sustainable development practices -Integration of sustainability initiatives -Integration of sustainability-related targets -Integration of sustainable environmental management system -Integration of environmental management -Integration of green practices -Integration of green innovation -Integration of green behaviours -Integration of lean-green practice	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between sustainability items integrated and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of sustainability items integrated in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of sustainability items integrated to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.30 presents the agenda for future research on sustainability aspects that can be integrated into SA SMEs. The agenda suggests suitable methods for the attainment of a reasonable result. Table 6.30 is a continuation of the above figure.

Table 6.30: Research agenda (2) on sustainability integration in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Integration of ecological sustainability considerations -Integration of ecological aspects -Integration of ecological & social sustainability -Integration of ecological & social governance practices -Integration of circular economy (CE) concept -Integration of sustainability initiatives -Integration of SDG framework -Integration of ecological, social and economic aspects	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between sustainability items integrated and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of sustainability items integrated in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of sustainability items integrated to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.30 (above) is the continuation of Table 6.29. The following section deals with the agenda for sustainability equilibrium in SA SMEs.

6.5.10 Research agenda about the sustainability balance of South African small and medium enterprise performance or sustainability

Section 5.3.10 and Figure 6.31 suggests the research agenda for sustainability balance on SA SMEs.

Table 6.31: Research agenda on sustainability balance in SA SME studies

Proposed agenda	Proposed research methods	Expected results
Research on SA SMEs about: -Balance of TBL approaches -Balance of sustainability approach -Balance of sustainability dimensions -Balance of sustainability aspects -Balance of sustainability practices -Balance of sustainability growth	Quantitative methods	Setting the links between sustainability items balanced and OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Qualitative methods	Identifying the roles of sustainability items balanced in OP and/ or sustainability dimensions
	Mixed methods	Identifying the inputs of sustainability items balanced to OP and/ or sustainability dimensions and determining the influence or impacts of corporate factors on OP and/ or sustainability dimensions

Source: Author's own

Table 6.31 presents the agenda for future research on the balance of sustainability aspects in SA SMEs. Further appropriate methods are suggested for the expected findings. The subsequent section discusses the future research areas.

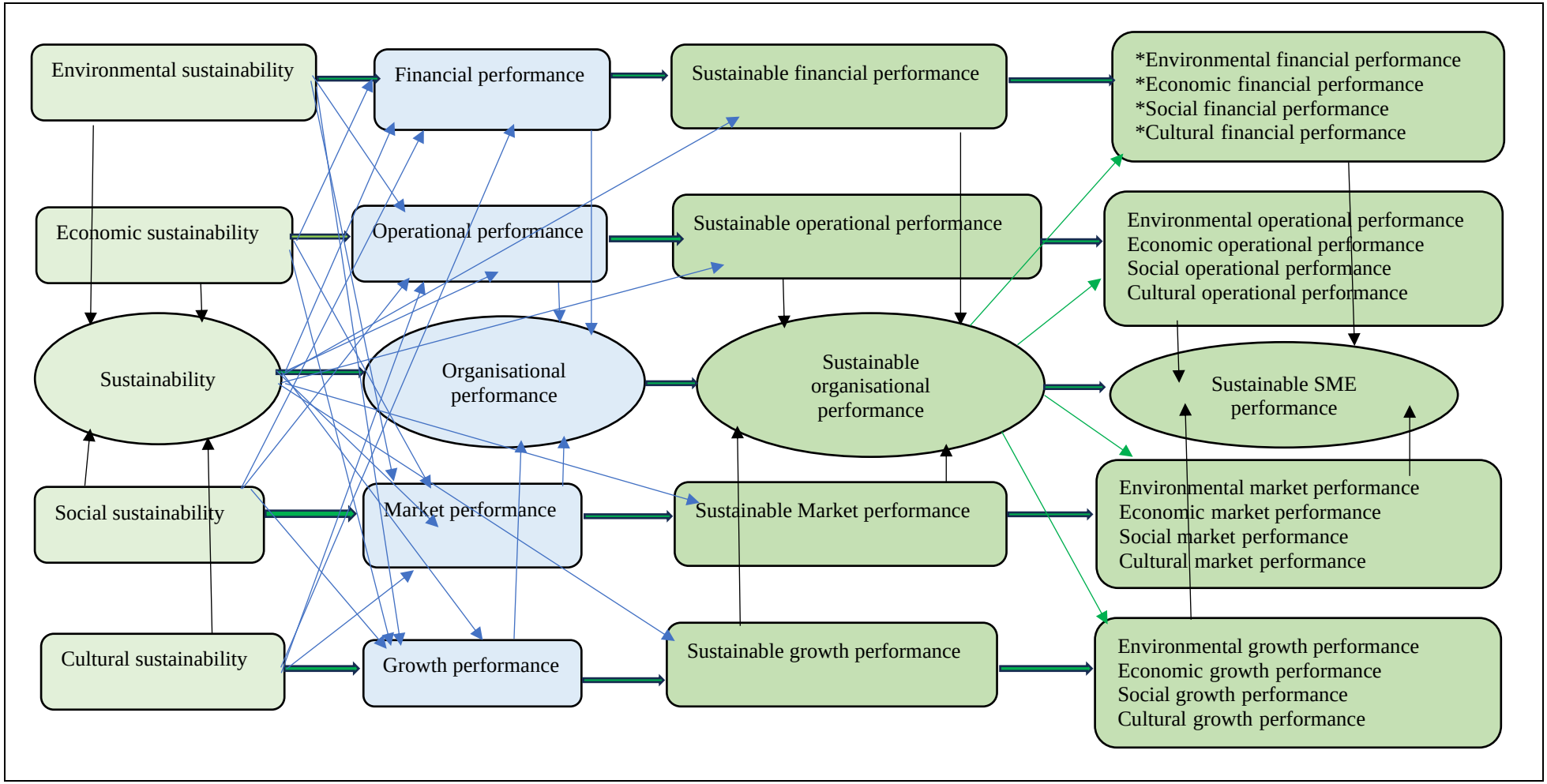
6.6 FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

Future research should aim to establish links between OP dimensions and sustainability dimensions, and to measure sustainable SME performance. Considering the integration of the four sustainability perspectives into the four OP dimensions and the innovative concepts built in this study, the study focuses on the measurement of the overall sustainable organisational performance, which involves sustainable dimensions, namely sustainable financial performance, sustainable operational performance, sustainable market performance, and sustainable growth performance. This highlights the need for the identification of sustainable indicators.

Therefore, the study identifies the indicators of environmental financial performance, economic financial performance, social financial performance, and cultural financial performance for sustainable financial performance. Similarly, indicators related to ecological operational performance, economic operational performance, social operational performance, and cultural operational performance are also identified for sustainable operational performance. Furthermore, environmental market performance, economic market performance, social market performance and cultural market performance indicators are identified for a sustainable market performance dimension. In the same way, the identification of respective indicators of environmental growth performance, economic growth performance, social growth performance and cultural growth performance should be considered for a sustainable growth perspective of performance.

Figure 6.2 below describes the future research plan in detail.

Figure 6.2: Future research planning



Source: Author's own

Figure 6.2. shows the possibility of establishing a connection among the sustainability dimensions and creating the link between the OP dimensions. The possibility of integrating each sustainability dimension into each OP dimension and establishing the relationship between OP perspectives and sustainability pillars should be the aim of future research.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This integrative literature review identified and analysed relevant empirical studies to create a more comprehensive representation of the literature on sustainability and OP of South African SMEs. This study presented multiple designs for a better understanding of the study. Thus, multiple frameworks framing the overall study were created in line with the key topic, research objectives, applicable theories, appropriate concepts, and themes of this study, as well as the contextual perspectives of the study. The frameworks presented in this study have the potential to collect quantitative, qualitative, and mixed data for future studies.

Conducting a literature review as a methodology was a challenging and tedious task but allows one to review a broad range of findings, dealing with multiple concepts at the same time. However, coding and categorisation at all levels of this research design might be seen as the strength of the ILT since it makes the process much easier and helps to understand the phenomenon under study and its related findings.

The use of a literature review in research is important as it allowed exploring multiple published studies regarding the topic of sustainability and OP of SA SMEs in the management field. It allowed for the review of a substantial number of studies from various academic published sources related to the specific subject and discipline.

In the literature reviewed, several published studies' findings were incorporated into the study as secondary data. Similarly, several publications were just used as literature. This approach allowed for a unique approach to address the research objectives and questions, adding a unique contribution to the field of study.

At the PhD level, LRM is very helpful in gaining more reliable information to respond adequately to the research question and achieve the research objectives of the study. There is a vast amount of published information that can be gathered in LRM that might not be collected when adopting other research methods. As a PhD thesis requires the generation of new

thoughts, philosophies, ideas, and research agendas, as well as the building of knowledge using theories, frameworks, and business model extension, as well as novel theories, outlines, and business model development, thus its feasibility might be adequately accomplished with an LRM. In addition, it allows for a far more comprehensive approach to collecting data for analysis in an attempt to get a broader perspective when using an LRM

Furthermore, ILR might be considered as a mono method, however, it can offer more results than mixed methods or multiple methods. Besides developing or extending frameworks, models, and theories, LRM also has the capability of building novel concepts, depending on the study and the researcher. In addition, the findings as a result of the LRM are a useful research instrument for future investigations. To conclude, ILR is like a family tree. The existence of every published literature related to the study should be acknowledged to prevent potential bias in the findings, likewise, all findings of the review should be considered from the transcription to the analysis, however, the discussions, identification of gaps and drawing of the research agenda should be done for literature focused on the context under study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of databases

Appendix B: List of selected

Appendix C: Corporate factors literature

Appendix D: Managerial factors literature

Appendix E: Business factors literature

Appendix F: Entrepreneurial factors literature

Appendix G: Leadership factors literature

Appendix H: Modernity factors literature

Appendix I: Sustainable factors literature

Appendix J: Sustainability implementation literature

Appendix K: Sustainability integration literature

Appendix L: Sustainability balance literature

Appendix M: Ethical Clearence Certificate