THE EFFECTS OF BUSINESS SUPPORT AS A START-UP FACTOR ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The study examined relationship between business support and business performance using 500 SMMEs in Gauteng province, South Africa. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 500 SMMEs owners. The findings from the survey were modelled through a categorical regression model with business performance as dependent variable. The level of significance of the four variables out of eight variables suggests that business support be classified as the strongest predictor of business performance.

Keywords: Business Support; Business Performance; Entrepreneur

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1 Introduction

Since the introduction of democracy in South Africa, the government implemented a range of new national support programmes that were designed to assist entrepreneurship development. The small businesses in SA represent an important vehicle to address the challenges of job creation, economic growth and equity. Many countries of the world are focusing on the development of the SMME sector to promote economic growth.

The government of South Africa put in place number of initiatives and institutions that are aiming to support small businesses in the country. They include: Small Business Development Agency, Small Enterprise Financial Agency, Industrial Development Agency, The National Youth Development Agency, the Land Bank and Micro-Agricultural Financial Institution and the South African Micro-Finance Apex Fund (DTI, 2005; DTI, 2011).

Even though the South African government is committed to support entrepreneurship through its agencies, not much has really changed in the improvement of small business development. Small businesses still struggle to have access to both financial and non-financial services. Even though the government repeated revising its policy and restructuring new and weak agencies, the country still struggle to create sustainable small business. It is therefore vital to check the effectiveness of government support towards business performance.

This paper is structured in the following manner: section 1 presented the research background and aim of the study. The next section, presents literature review on business support and business performance. The section further elaborates the constructs used in this study and outlines proposed hypotheses. Section 3 presents the research methodology and finally, section 4 concludes the paper with a discussion of the findings.

2 Literature review

This section provides an overview background of business support and business performance.

Business owners have to ensure that for their businesses to be successful, their businesses have to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. For one to improve the effectiveness and efficiency it requires an understanding of the key drivers within the business and practical approach to implement processes that optimise the key drivers. To improve the business performance one need to have all relevant key drivers be identified and regularly evaluated against key performance indicators like business targets and benchmark data. By implementing a continual improvement program that will ensure that key business resources are being utilised efficiently and effectively.

Even if the South African government has devoted considerable resources to support small businesses, the 2004 national survey of small business enterprise reported that government fails to reach small business enterprises (DTI, 2005). The survey reported that the small businesses are either unaware or do not use the services offered by government (Orford, Herrington & Wood, 2004). Though the government support agencies fail to meet the needs of small business and the incapacity of support institutions to raise awareness about their existence, it is therefore important to determine the impact of these support agencies on business performance. The

government did acknowledge the contribution that small businesses can make to alleviate unemployment through policy that can benefit them.

2.1 Business support

According to the Department of Trade and Industry report (DTI, 2005), support of small businesses as an emerging sector in the global business environment, is an important means of raising the level of entrepreneurship in society. Investing in small businesses is an important way for countries to exponentially increase the impact of new venture creation. Countries would be putting themselves at disadvantage and thwart their opportunity to increase economic growth if they ignore this proven potential of small business entrepreneurial activities (Phillips, Moos & Nieman, 2014). It is important for government or all countries of the world to find ways to empower small businesses' participation and success in entrepreneurship through sustainable and successful economic development. Therefore the SA government entrusted the DTI to coordinate the implementation of government support strategy to SMMEs and initiatives for entrepreneurs were put in place. The following institutions were developed to assist the SA government's efforts in establishing entrepreneurship: Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA); Small Enterprise Finance Agency; South African Micro-Finance Apex Fund (SAMAF); National Youth Development Agency and the provincial development corporations like Gauteng Enterprise Propeller and Gauteng Economic Development Agency. This shows that South African government has invested considerable resources into supporting small businesses. Literature has identified number of shortcomings from the micro and macro-economic evaluation of small business support programmes. Chalera (2008) also reported that the government admits that its financial and non-financial institutions are not meeting the needs of the small businesses and that SEDA has become a wasteful bureaucracy and out of touch with SMMEs respectively. Robergson (2004) reported that there is a general mistrust to external agencies among SMMEs on one hand and the incapacity of support institutions to persuasively raise awareness about their existence and effectiveness on the other hand. Thus, this study suggests that: There is a positive significant relationship between business support and business performance: H01.

2.2 Business performance

Laitinen (2002) describe business performance as "the company's capability to produce the targeted output satisfying the needs of the interest groups". This description can also be applied in small and medium sized enterprises' business performance. Examining the performance of small and medium enterprises can be problematic, especially when objective measures of performance are not available. Cooper and Gascon (1992) highlight individual factors influencing performance as experience, education, occupation of parents, gender, race, age and the entrepreneur's goals. In addition, other studies highlight financial measures and other measures that are normally termed non-financial measures.

Some studies suggest a combination of financial and non-financial measures would offer a more comprehensive evaluation on a firm's performance (Li, Huang, & Tsai, 2009) as financial measures alone may not provide an accurate assessment of business performance. Subjective non-financial measures include indicators such as perceived market share, perceived sales growth, customer satisfaction, loyalty and brand equity (Li et al, 2009). Murphy, Trailer and Hill (1996) examined 51 published entrepreneurial studies using performance as the dependent variable and found that the most commonly considered dimensions of performance were related to efficiency, growth and profit. Efficiency comprises some financial measures like return on investment and return on equity; growth focuses on increase in sales, employees or market share; and profit includes return on sales and net profit margin.

It is always difficult to examine the performance of SMMEs, especially when objective measures of performance are not publicly available. Collection of financial data like sales revenue and net profit through surveys often results in "item nonresponse" due to a business owner's reluctance to disclose this type of information (Hallak, Assaker & O'Connor, 2012).

The aim of this article is to establish the relationship between business support and business performance. The major question that arose from the research is: do business support have an impact on business performance?

Bandura (2001) states that goals do not automatically activate the evaluative processes that affect performance. High achievers tend to make self-satisfaction contingent upon the attainment of difficult goals; low achievers adopt easy goals as sufficient (Bandura, 2001). The researcher argues that high levels of entrepreneurship will yield enhanced effort and persistence, increased planning, and increased intention toward business start-up.

Therefore the study suggest that: **$H_0$1;** There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**a: my business income; **$H_0$1**b-my business profit; **$H_0$1**c- my market share; **$H_0$1**d- my return on investment; **$H_0$1**e-number of employees; **$H_0$1**f- product line).

3 Methodology

The population of the study is SMMEs (Small, Medium and Micro enterprises) in the retail sector of

the Gauteng province of South Africa. The researcher uses the brabys.com populations of SMMEs in Gauteng since this organisation is reliable and is the leading registry of SMMEs in the country (GEM 2010). According to brabys.com, the population size of SMMEs in the retail industry in Gauteng province is 10 000. The study population was therefore based on 10 000 SMMEs.

Probability sampling was used to ensure that each member of SMME population is given a known non-zero chance of selection. Simple random sampling was utilised to identify the respondents. This increased accuracy and precision of the sample in representing the characteristics of the population of SMMEs in retail industry in that province.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2008), the sample size that is acceptable is 5% of the total population. Given this study's estimate of a population of 10 000, it means that the targeted sample was 500 respondents (that is, 10 000 entrepreneurs X 0.05 = 500 respondents). A structured research instrument (a questionnaire) was used to collect data through self-administration interviews. Out of the targeted sample of 500 SMMEs, 466 responses were received which yielded a 93.2% response rate.

3.1 Measures

The investigative questions concerned the following constructs:

3.1.1 Business support

According to the Department of Trade and Industry report (DTI, 2005), support of small businesses as an emerging sector in the global business environment, is an important means of raising the level of entrepreneurship in society. Investing in small businesses is an important way for countries to exponentially increase the impact of new venture creation.

The respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed with statements on business support. The factors were grouped into: *training from government; training from community; finance from government; finance from community; procurement from government and procurement from community; counselling from government and counselling from community*. This section of the questionnaire was aimed at establishing the extent to which business support influences the performance of a business. The eight items were aimed at getting the respondents to indicate the extent to which they (entrepreneurs) viewed certain factors as a basis for their start-ups. These factors also influence the reason to start or not to start a business. A list of independent variables used to quantify business performance is:

3.1.2 Business performance

Trailer and Hill (1996) examined 51 published entrepreneurial studies using performance as the dependent variable and found that the most commonly considered dimensions of performance were related to efficiency, growth and profit. Efficiency comprises some financial measures like return on investment and return on equity; growth focuses on increase in sales, employees or market share; and profit includes return on sales and net profit margin.

List of independent variables used to quantify business performance are; my business income; my business profit; market share; return on investment; number of employees and product line. Respondents were requested to rate the extent to which they agree with the statements on business performance. A five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree and strongly disagree) was used for each of the six questions that were asked. The 6 items were aimed at finding out the performance of business.

The assumption was that there is a relationship between business support and business performance. The researchers therefore wanted to see if this was true and to find out which factors affect business positively and to what extent.

3.2 Analysis

The statistical analysis makes use of a categorical regression model to facilitate the investigation of causal relationship in the data. This model was preferred over other categorical association measures such as chi-square, Cromer's V and Lamda, which would not allow the same level of analysis, especially with regard to causal relationships. Another reason of using categorical regression model derives from the usage of ordinal and nominal data in the model and also that the dependent variable is dichotomous. The dependent variable is defined as the performance of a business with six categories, namely my business income; my business profit; market share; return on income; number of employees and product line. The alpha reliability of the scale was 0.845.

4 Results

4.1 My business income

There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**a: my business income).

The results from the analysis of variance are depicted in table 1 below. These show that the model variance (1.261) is considerably higher than the error variance (0.990), indicating that the different predictors separately and conjointly succeeded in predicting business performance significantly at 95% level of certainty.

Table 1. ANOVA: my business income

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	23.960	19	1.261	1.274	.197
Residual	391.040	395	.990		
Total	415.000	414			

The regression coefficients obtained by estimating the full model is presented in Table 2 below. Given that a total of 500 observations were used, the fairly large number of variables listed can be included in the regression to determine which ones are significant in determining business performance.

The standardised coefficients with regard to "my business income" in table below were found to present strong predictors of business performance. With regard to my business income, some of the variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance. These include the following: *training from government; training from community; finance from community and procurement from community.*

These factors do not relate strongly to business support and are not predictors of business performance under "my business income". The table shows some business support factors between 5% and 20% level of significance. Statistically, these factor (namely; finance from government (with chances of very high returns) can be considered as of marginal significance. These can be tested further in another research project.

Table 2: Regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance (My business income)

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Training- Gov	.011	.248	1	.002	.002
Training – Comm	102	.128	2	.632	.012
Finance – Gov	.060	.158	4	.146	.965
Finance – Comm	-.066	.199	1	.109	.009
Procurement - Gov	-.113	.106	3	1.144	.331
Procurement -Comm	-.088	.171	3	.264	.014
Counselling - Gov	-.111	.146	3	.582	.627
Counselling - Comm	.132	.122	2	1.174	.310

Table 2 shows regression coefficient indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance.

With regard to business income, some of the variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance but only four (*training from government; training from community; finance from community and procurement from community*), are predictors of business performance under "my business income" with significance level of 0.002; 0.012; 0.009 and 0.014. The hypothesis (**$H_0$1**a) is accepted for these variables only.

4.2 My business profit

There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**a: my business profit). With regard to "my business profit" most variables do not affect business performance. The significance level of most of the variables falls above the 0.05% level of significance. There are few strong predictors of business performance.

Table 3 ANOVA: my business profit

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	29.821	14	2.130	2.212	.007
Residual	387.179	402	.963		`
Total	417.000	416			

The results from the analysis of variance are depicted in table 3 above. These show that the model variance (2.130) is considerably higher than the error

variance (0.963), indicating that the different predictors separately and conjointly succeeded in predicting business performance significantly at 95% level of certainty.

With regard to "my business profit", the majority of variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance. This implies that these variables should not be considered for any improvement in business performance.

Table 4: Regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance (my business profit)

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Training- Gov	.133	.200	2	.438	.018
Training – Comm	-.093	.125	1	.553	.013
Finance – Gov	.155	.140	2	1.231	.293
Finance – Comm	.148	.162	1	.830	.003
Procurement - Gov	-.126	.117	2	1.150	.318
Procurement -Comm	-.109	.140	3	.611	.608
Counselling - Gov	-.081	.130	2	.391	.677
Counselling - Comm	.093	.137	1	.466	.016

Table 4 shows the regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance.

With regard to "my business profit", some of the variables (from business support) are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance but only four (training from government; training from community; finance from community and counselling from community), **are predictors of business performance** under **"my business profit"** with significance level of 0.018; 0.013; 0.003 and 0.016. Hypothesis (**$H_0$1**b) is accepted for these variables.

The table shows some business support factors between 5% and 20% level of significance. Statistically, these factors (namely; procurement from community and counselling from government) can be considered as of marginal significance. These factors can be tested further in another research project.

4.3 My market share

There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**a: my market share).

With regard to "my market share" some variables affect business performance. The significance level of most variables falls above the 0.05% level of significance. They are not strong predictors of business performance.

Table 5 ANOVA: my market share

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	41.021	15	2.735	2.916	.000
Residual	377.979	403	.938		
Total	419.000	418			

The results from the analysis of variance are depicted in table 5 above. These show that the model variance (2.735) is considerably higher than the error variance (0.938), indicating that the different predictors separately and conjointly succeeded in predicting business performance significantly at 95% level of certainty.

With regard to "my market share", some variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance.

Table 6 above shows the regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance.

With regard to "my market share", most variables are above 0.050 level of significance and cannot be regarded as predictors of business performance but only three (training from community; finance from government and finance from

community), are regarded as predictors of business performance with significance level of 0.000; 0.004 and 0.016. These variables are strong predictors of market share under business performance. Hypothesis (**$H_0$1c**) is accepted for these variables only. Negative factors will be tested again in another project.

Table 6. Regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Training- Gov	.193	.215	2	.803	.449
Training - Comm	.003	.175	1	.000	.000
Finance – Gov	173	.173	3	1.004	.004
Finance - Comm	-.072	.172	1	.176	.016
Procurement - Gov	-.106	.126	3	.713	.545
Procurement -Comm	-.080	.120	2	.436	.647
Counselling - Gov	.107	.177	2	.366	.694
Counselling - Comm	.174	.156	1	1.247	.265

4.4 My return on investment

There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**a: my return on investment).

With regard to "my return on investment" some variables affect business performance. The significance level of some of the variables falls above the 0.05% level of significance. There are few predictors of business performance.

Table 7 ANOVA: my return on investment

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	33.933	12	2.828	2.986	.001
Residual	373.067	394	.947		
Total	407.000	406			

The results from the analysis of variance are depicted in table 7 above. These show that the model variance (2.828) is considerably higher than the error variance (0.947), indicating that the different predictors separately and conjointly succeeded in predicting business performance significantly at 95% level of certainty.

With regard to "my return on investment", some of variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance.

Table 8. Regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance.

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Training- Gov	.216	.152	2	2.015	.135
Training - Comm	-.082	.181	1	.005	.005
Finance – Gov	.021	.187	1	.013	.013
Finance - Comm	-.101	.195	1	.001	.001
Procurement - Gov	-.183	.129	3	1.993	.114
Procurement -Comm	-.076	.120	1	.405	.525
Counselling - Gov	-.012	.207	1	.003	.003
Counselling - Comm	.190	.116	2	2.674	.070

With regard to "my return on investment", some of the variables (from business support) are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance but only four (training from community; finance from government; finance from community and counselling from government), are predictor of business performance with significance level of 0.005; 0.013; 0.001 and 0.003 respectively. Hypothesis (**$H_0$1**d) is accepted on these variables only and rejected on variables that are negative. Further test on weak predictors will be done in another study.

4.5 Number of employees

There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**e: number of employees).

With regard to "number of employees" some variables (from business support) affect business performance. The significance of some variables falls above the 0.05% level of significance. There are few strong predictors of business performance.

Table 9. ANOVA: number of employees

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	25.521	13	1.963	2.020	.018
Residual	395.479	407	.972		
Total	421.000	420			

The results from the analysis of variance are depicted in table 9 above. These show that the model variance (1.963) is considerably higher than the error variance (0.972), indicating that the different predictors separately and conjointly succeeded in predicting business performance significantly at 95% level of certainty.

With regard to "number of employees", some of the variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance.

Table 10. Regression coefficients indicating the significance of business support variables to business performance

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Training- Gov	-.130	.218	1	.356	.551
Training - Comm	.061	.134	2	206	.006
Finance - Gov	-.027	.156	2	.030	.030
Finance - Comm	-.057	.138	2	.172	.012
Procurement - Gov	.046	.150	1	.096	.016
Procurement -Comm	.123	.154	2	.641	.527
Counselling - Gov	-.126	.114	2	1.220	.296
Counselling - Comm	-.127	.144	1	.784	.376

With regard to "number of employees", some of the variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance but at least four (training from community; finance from government; finance from community and procurement from government), **are predictors of business performance** under "number of employees" with significance level of 0.006; 0.030; 0.012 and 0.016 respectively. Hypothesis (**$H_0$1**e) is accepted with these variables. Negative variable are rejected and will need further tests in another study.

4.6 Product lines

There is a significant positive relationship exists between business support and business performance (**$H_0$1**f: product lines).

With regard to "product lines" some variables (from business support) affect business performance. The significance level of some of the variables falls above the 0.05% level of significance. They are not strong predictors of business performance.

Table 11. ANOVA: product lines

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	34.025	17	2.001	2.084	.007
Residual	388.975	405	.960		
Total	423.000	422			

The results from the analysis of variance are depicted in table 11 above. These show that the model variance (2.001) is considerably higher than the error variance (0.960), indicating that the different predictors separately and conjointly succeeded in predicting business performance significantly at 95% level of certainty.

With regard to "product lines", some of the variables are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance.

Table 12. Regression coefficients indicating the significance business support variables to business performance

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Training- Gov	.047	.177	1	.050	.050
Training - Comm	.061	.163	3	.042	.042
Finance - Gov	.024	.141	2	.030	.030
Finance - Comm	-.124	.121	2	.351	.351
Procurement - Gov	.112	.103	3	.319	.319
Procurement -Comm	.276	.136	2	.017	.017
Counselling - Gov	.064	.141	1	.026	.026
Counselling - Comm	-.185	.186	3	.396	.396

With regard to "product lines", some variables (business support) are above 0.050 level of significance and can therefore be regarded as weak predictors of business performance but only four (training from government; training from community; finance from government and counselling from government), **are predictor of business performance** under "product line" with significance level of 0.050; 0.042; 0.030 and 0.026 respectively. Hypothesis **($H_0$1**f) is accepted with these variables and rejected with weak predictors of business performance factors.

These findings, depicting the magnitude of the business environment in the study area, clearly confirm the positive impact of business support on business performance.

This conclusion enlightens the first research question, namely, the possible positive impacts of business support on business performance. The variables relating to this phenomenon are best predictors of business performance. The strong predictive value of business support as independent variables of business performance confirms that these factors should be there in individual entrepreneur for the business to perform better. It is clear from the tables above that other variables do not impact the business performance at all.

5 Conclusion and recommendation

As indicated above, some business support factors are not predictors of business performance. The following were found to be predictors of business performance: training by government; training by community; finance by community and procurement by community. Other factors were found to be weak predictors of business performance. The study conducted by Radipere (2013) found that there is a significant correlation between business support and business performance. Certain factors found to be good predictors of business performance on other variables as highlighted on the findings and discussion above while other factors are found to be not predictors of business performance. The level of significance in respect of 4 out of 8 independent variables suggests that business support should be classified as the predictor of business performance.

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