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*Strategic Entrepreneurship and Business Performance of Small
and Medium-Sized Enterprises – the Mediating Effect of Perceived
Organizational Support*

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Abstract

Theoretical background: Strategic entrepreneurship (SE) is one of the key concepts in a large body of entrepreneurship literature. By combining strategic management and entrepreneurship, SE emphasizes the importance of innovation, culture, leadership, and resources in generating long-term value. SE enables organizations to efficiently pursue sustainable advantage and opportunity identification, resulting in improved business performance (BP). This is of particular importance for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which, on the one hand, are a sector that stimulates economic growth and competitiveness and reduces unemployment, but on the other hand, they encounter a number of constraints during their growth and expansion. At the same time, the influence of SE on BP is mediated or moderated by various factors, including perceived organizational support (POS).

Purpose of the article: The main objective of the study is to identify and analyse the impact of EP on the performance of SMEs, taking into account the mediating effect of POS on this relationship.

Research methods: To achieve the research objective, a survey was conducted among 200 manufacturing SMEs in Poland in 2022. The research sample was randomly selected, and respondents expressed their

opinions on a 5-point Likert scale. The variables studied were the averages of 4–5 items prepared based on the literature. The internal consistency of the set of variables was measured using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Then, statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis using the Kendall's Tau coefficient, and regression analysis were used.

Main findings: The main results of the study showed a statistically significant relationship between SE and BP. At the same time, it was confirmed that POS mediates the SE-BP relationship, however, the direct impact turned out to be stronger than the impact that is mediated by the POS variable.

Introduction

Research on entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviours and intentions within organizations is a frequently discussed topic in management sciences.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in terms of economic growth, stability, and development of a nation, as well as reducing poverty, empowering individuals, encouraging innovation, or maximising wealth (Okoi et al., 2022). SMEs are up against a variety of obstacles in this age of constant change. Due to globalization, SMEs must always be more transparent, complex, and competitive from the inside as well as the outside of their companies. These kinds of socioeconomic shifts bring challenges and issues that need to be resolved. They need to have an effective business strategy in order to compete with rivals (Arijanto et al., 2022).

There is growing proof that suggests SMEs could gain from adopting a more entrepreneurial mindset in place of the traditional scarcity approach (Morris et al., 2020). The capacity for entrepreneurial competencies is highly advantageous for SMEs, as the competences possessed by the business owner have the potential to impact the company's overall success. Entrepreneurial-minded business owners can identify many ways to impact company performance in order to successfully launch and grow their enterprise. Furthermore, a strategy is required for future business planning. Entrepreneurship strategy is considered a plan with all alternative paths that can be taken as a means of achieving future objectives by an organization and all its members. Entrepreneurs must possess the abilities to manage strategically by seeking out different possibilities and always trying to do better (Wijaya & Said, 2024).

Although the relationships between strategic entrepreneurship (SE) and performance have already been analysed in the literature, the results of these studies, although they mostly confirm the positive SE-BP relationship, remain ambiguous. It should be noted, however, that increasingly often studies of the above relationship take into account the influence of moderating and mediating factors. However, a full diagnosis in this regard has not been made, which creates a cognitive gap. The current study tries to fill this gap by diagnosing the impact of POS on the SE-BP relationship, which is the subject of very few previous studies. Meanwhile, POS is treated as an important organizational variable, determining the effectiveness of human resources management, which undoubtedly has an impact on the results and success of the orga-

nization. The novelty of the study is also the narrowing of the research subjects to the SME sector, due to the specificity of this sector, also in the field of HR management. The study can therefore constitute a theoretical contribution by supplementing the scientific achievements with analyses regarding the combined use of SE and POS in order to intensify the performance of the organization. Moreover, the study has practical implications for managers of SMEs who can develop, test, and implement support tools that would enhance the entrepreneurship of the organization and at the same time result in improved performance and competitiveness.

The paper is organized as follows. Prior to developing hypotheses, the pertinent literature will be reviewed. The methods will then be explained. The findings will then be discussed and presented. The publication ends with a summary of the findings, along with a presentation of the study's limitations and potential future research direction.

Literature review

Strategic entrepreneurship

Strategic entrepreneurship (SE) has attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years because of its practical significance. Research on SE has expanded significantly, creating a large body of literature as numerous scholars underscore the significance of identifying growth potential in SE (Khan et al., 2024). The study of SE has advanced significantly since its conception in the early 2000s. Simultaneously, some academics criticize SE and cast doubt on its applicability as a method of understanding the strategic application of entrepreneurship (Ireland et al., 2023). SE is defined as the activities of new or existing companies that are clearly linked to initiatives based on the search for a competitive advantage. These efforts result in the exploration of new markets, innovative processes, entry into new products, or advancements in technology (Ioniță, 2022).

Entrepreneurship has always been indicated as a construct of strategic nature. SE indicates that a company understands the value of seizing chances with long-term implications (Hodge & Ratten, 2015). Keyhani (2023) indicates that both creating a strategy without entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship not included in the strategy increase the probability of a company's ineffectiveness or even its failure. According to Hitt et al. (2011), utilizing SE effectively pushes smaller entrepreneurial ventures to learn how to become more strategic and big, established enterprises to learn how to become more entrepreneurial. Thus, through opportunity- and advantage-seeking actions, the notion of SE enables firms of all sizes and ages to achieve success in a dynamic and globalizing environment while preserving profits (Tülüce & Yurtkur, 2015; Zucchella & Magnani, 2016).

SE helps businesses grow their employees' abilities and skills and launch creative projects (Khan et al., 2024). By combining strategic management and entrepreneurship, SE emphasizes the importance of innovation, culture, leadership, and resources in generating long-term value (Xin et al., 2023). Businesses can benefit from SE by producing more accurately and effectively, which leads to responsive and flexible products and services that are ultimately more sustainable (Farida et al., 2022). The presentation of opportunity- and advantage-seeking behaviours concurrently that eventually provide better value for individuals, organizations, and society at large is the focus of SE (Khan et al., 2024).

For an organization to succeed and generate wealth, both strategic management and entrepreneurship are necessary (Hitt et al., 2001). SE is predicated on two fundamental principles: the formulation and execution of strategy necessitate entrepreneurial concepts, including vigilance, creativity, and judgement; and opportunity- and advantage-seeking behaviours should be regarded collectively (Khan et al., 2024).

Ketchen et al. (2007) delineated the integration of strategy and entrepreneurial domains, achieving a balance between opportunity- and advantage-seeking activities. The primary pillars of SE are the continuous innovation of either product or process and an appropriate managerial mindset within the firm. The process starts with outlining new opportunities with an entrepreneurial mindset. Next, the company moves toward strategic behaviour through strategic resource management. Finally, the company joins the entrepreneurial movement by fostering innovation and using creativity (Alshagawi & Mabkhot, 2024). By incorporating innovative and optimizing strategies, SE promotes a dynamic approach that supports sustainable business growth (Mazzei, 2018).

Perceived organizational support

The paradigm known as perceived organizational support (POS) theory looks at how much workers feel their company appreciates their efforts and is concerned about their welfare. POS is regarded as a universal belief that each employee forms about how they evaluate company policies and procedures. This belief is formed based on their understanding of company operations, their acceptance of resources, their interactions with managers, and their impressions of the company's concern for their well-being. It implies that when workers feel supported by the company, they are more likely to adopt excellent attitudes and behaviours, which boosts performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Sulaeman et al., 2024).

Support from the organization encourages employees to adopt positive behaviours and attitudes that benefit the company and, as a result, can boost productivity, enhance collaboration, and increase overall effectiveness of the company (Sun, 2019). However, negative outcomes, including lower levels of social behaviours, increased turnover intentions, and decreased job satisfaction, can occur when employees feel unsupported or encounter breaches in the psychological contract (Yongxing et al., 2017).

It is stressed that the idea of a psychological contract between an employee and his place of employment – which deals with the arrangements of working conditions – should not be confused with the concept of POS, which is the subjective evaluation of the treatment of the employee by management (Ahmad & Zafar, 2018). POS can include both tangible forms of support (salary, benefits, promotion opportunities) and intangible forms (recognition, respect, trust) (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Previous publications indicate that employees with a higher POS rate evaluate their work more positively, showing greater job satisfaction and a sense of agency, and being more engaged in their organization (Rubel et al., 2023).

POS assumes a crucial role in the contemporary era with increasingly frequent crises of diverse origins, point of sale systems. When faced with a crisis, a company may support its staff members in overcoming any challenge or risk by acting as an essential asset in managing a demanding work environment and preventing them from stressing at work (Charoensukmongkol, 2022).

Business performance of SMEs

The development of SMEs in the national economy indicates that its growth is a potential remedy for unemployment and stimulation of GDP growth. Nevertheless, SMEs encounter a number of constraints during their growth and expansion. Hence, it is so important to constantly search for ways and tools to improve their performance (Handayati et al., 2023).

Business performance (BP) offers an evaluation of achieving established objectives. This capacity enables the company to determine its strengths and weaknesses (Wijaya, 2023). BP refers to the efficacy of output criteria in an enterprise's production and business activities. The standard for measuring business performance in SMEs remains a topic of controversy with respect to the indicators used for measurement. An organization's performance outlook can be assessed from a number of aspects. From the manager's perspective, measuring the performance of SMEs is complicated, but it may be done using either or both sets of indicators: financial, non-financial, or both (Loan et al., 2023). Financial performance is a broad metric of organizational effectiveness that quantifies how well a company uses its assets to create income over time. Through its performance dynamics, investors and stakeholders evaluate the organization's overall health as well (Ahli et al., 2024).

Hypotheses development

SE enables organizations to efficiently pursue sustainable advantage and opportunity identification, resulting in improved performance for SMEs (Baldo et al., 2023; Stanković et al., 2022). Shirokova and Ivvonen (2016) assert that SE is the primary force behind how businesses create wealth. A large body of research on entrepreneurship indicates that SE has a positive association with the performance

of businesses (Kantur, 2016; Veidal & Korneliussen, 2013). Other studies indicate also that corporate entrepreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship are positively related to firm performance (Ziyae & Sadeghi, 2021). The study of Estrada-Cruz et al. (2022) confirmed the impact of SE on the organization's results, focusing especially on whether this impact is greater in an environment of high competitive intensity. Antoncic and Hisrich (2001) have provided empirical evidence of a positive relationship between intrapreneurship and performance (growth and profitability) and found out that corporate entrepreneurship would act as a mediator in this relationship.

Although new ventures and small businesses are adept at identifying opportunities, they encounter difficulty in establishing a sustainable competitive advantage over time. Large, well-established businesses, on the other hand, might be less skilled at identifying fresh chances but great at creating long-lasting advantages. By fusing the advantages of the two strategies, SE resolves this contradiction and empowers SMEs to both recognize and take advantage of opportunities and establish long-term advantages (Jahangard et al., 2023). Anderson-Seminario and Alvarez-Risco (2023) state that SE helps SMEs adapt to change, develop, and grow by merging entrepreneurial and strategic viewpoints. This improves SMEs' overall performance. Thus, businesses of all sizes should incorporate SE into their operations so they can increase profitability and market share (Yudhanto et al., 2023). The above allowed for the following hypothesis:

H1: SE has a positive impact on business performance of SMEs.

The POS variable appears in various approaches in previous studies on corporate entrepreneurship and SE and organizational performance and success. A study conducted on Pakistani telecom industry employees revealed a significant impact of organizational support on corporate entrepreneurship dimensions, as well as on new business venturing and self-renewal (Kashif et al., 2015). The results of another study on 216 SMEs in Oman revealed that POS and entrepreneurial leadership have a significant and positive impact on organizational performance. Moreover, entrepreneurial leadership plays the role of a mediator of POS-organizational performance relationship (Imran & Aldaas, 2020).

The significant relationship between POS and organizational entrepreneurship among teachers in Iran was identified by Alizadeh et al. (2013). In turn, Zhang and Jia (2010) found out that employees' POS mediated the dependency between high-performance human resource practices and corporate entrepreneurship.

Another study showed that POS mediates the relationship between intrapreneurial competencies and organizational growth of small manufacturing firms in Nigeria (Okwor et al., 2022). On the other hand, the study results confirmed a mediating effect of POS on the statistically significant impact of high commitment on strategic entrepreneurship (Al-Janabi & Al Kurdi, 2023). Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: Perceived organizational support mediate the relationship between SE and BP of SMEs.

Research methods

The main objective of the study is to identify and analyse the impact of EP on the performance of SMEs, taking into account the mediating effect of POS on this relationship.

In order to collect primary data from the managers of the SMEs from Poland, the present study used a survey research method. Data was gathered from the manufacturing industry. A questionnaire survey was created and administered in Poland in 2022 for the study's purposes. A randomized group of businesses was chosen from the small- and medium-sized business sector. To guarantee the study's representativeness, an expert market research organization distributed the online survey. A seed study was conducted in advance of the research to validate and enhance the research instrument. There were two hundred manufacturing enterprises in the final research sample. The sample consisted of 52% small and 48% medium-sized enterprises. The dominant type of enterprise in the study is a mature (69%), non-family (74.5%) company operating regionally or nationally (63.5%).

In the survey questionnaire, the variables consisted of items that were prepared and adapted based on the literature. The ES variable consisted of 4 items, and the POS variable consisted of 5 items. In turn, the analysis of performance was limited only to financial performance, which was built from 4 items, i.e. the level of revenue, assets, investment, and employment. All responses were rated by respondents on a 5-point Likert scale, which is a very popular form in management sciences.

In the study, the viewpoint of managers was adopted. Senior managers or entrepreneurs made up the respondents. This strategy sought to systematize the possible outcomes that can be skewed by employing a mixed employee–manager approach.

The internal consistency of a set of variables was measured using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was used to examine the research reliability. As the accepted value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.7, it should be indicated that for SE variable the level of Cronbach's alpha is satisfactory, and for POS and BP is high (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha reliability test

| SE | POS | BP |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 0.703 | 0.912 | 0.804 |

Source: Author's own study.

The next step was the statistical analysis of the survey data. For this purpose, statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis using the Kendall Tau coefficient, and regression analysis were used.

Results and discussion

The first step of the analysis was the presentation of descriptive statistics for the studied variables, i.e. ES, POS and BP. For graphical presentation, a box plot was prepared (Figure 1) as a method for demonstrating graphically the locality, spread, and skewness groups of numerical data through their quartiles. The highest average score was obtained by the POS variable – 3.88 on a 5-point Likert scale. In this case, the highest level of standard deviation (0.90) is also visible, which indicates significant dispersion of respondents' answers. In turn, the lowest score was related to the organization's performance (mean 3.19), which can be explained by the fact that the research was carried out in 2022, i.e. shortly after the crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of the SE variable, for which the average score of the respondents was 3.67, the smallest standard deviation (0.75) is also visible, which confirms the greater consistency of the scores in the research sample. Left-skewed was observed for all variables (from -0.33 to -0.61), which means, that most values were found on the right side of the mean.

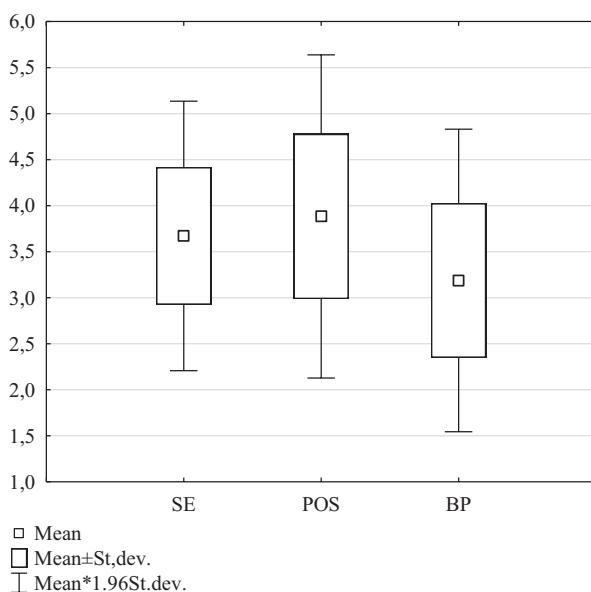


Figure 1. Structural model: Path coefficient and *p*-values

Source: Author's own study.

Due to the use of the Likert scale to evaluate individual items, it was decided to use Kendall's Tau correlation coefficient in the correlation analysis. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.001$. The correlation analysis showed statistically significant dependencies with a positive direction for all examined variables (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation analysis ($n = 200; p < 0.001$)

| | Mean | Median | S.D. | SE | POS | BP |
|-----|------|--------|------|------|------|------|
| SE | 3.67 | 3.75 | 0.75 | 1.00 | | |
| POS | 3.88 | 4.00 | 0.90 | 0.50 | 1.00 | |
| BP | 3.19 | 3.25 | 0.88 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 1.00 |

Source: Author’s own study.

The creation of a structural model with path analysis was the next stage of the analysis. To verify the research hypotheses, the direct and indirect effects between variables were diagnosed. The statistical significance of all direct effects was confirmed and presented in Figure 2 as path coefficients for the variables analysed.

Although the model confirms the expected relationships, the relatively modest strength of the mediated effect suggests the presence of other unmeasured variables influencing BP. This indicates a need for a more nuanced approach in future research, potentially including additional organizational or contextual factors that may moderate or mediate these relationships.

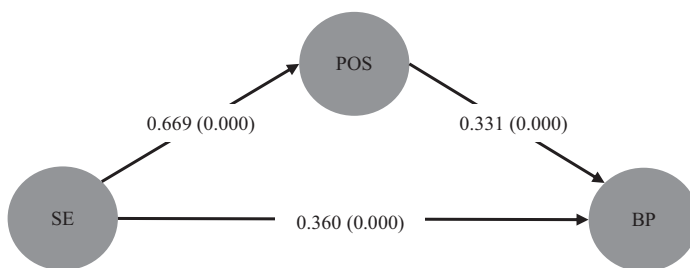


Figure 2. Structural model: Path coefficient and p -values

Source: Author’s own study.

The hypotheses’ testing results are summarized in Table 3. Both direct and indirect effects are confirmed. It should be noted, however, that the direct impact turned out to be stronger than the impact that is mediated by the POS variable. It can therefore be assumed that the importance of support in the organization for building success based on entrepreneurship is limited.

Although all tested hypotheses were statistically confirmed, the model’s explanatory power remains moderate, suggesting that SE and POS do not fully explain the variance in business outcomes. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to draw causal conclusions, as the directionality of the relationship cannot be definitively established. It is also worth noting that the strength of the mediation effect may depend on contextual variables – such as firm size, industry, or organizational culture – that were not controlled for in this study.

Table 3. Direct and indirect (mediation) effects

| Hypotheses | | β | t | p-value | Conclusion |
|------------|---------------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|------------|
| H1 | SE \rightarrow BP | 0.360 | 6.105 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H2 | SE \rightarrow POS \rightarrow BP | 0.221 | 3.538 | 0.000 | Supported |

Source: Author's own study.

The diagnosis of the positive effect of SE on BP is consistent with previous studies in this area. Hadryś (2024) emphasized the role of the strategic level entrepreneurship on firm's results, its development or value. Such conclusions were reached by Alsoud and Al Shawabkeh (2024), who diagnosed that strategic entrepreneurship contributes positively by 74.23% to firm performance. However, there are studies that failed to confirm SE impact on BP of SMEs, finding it insignificant (Alshagawi & Mabkhot, 2024). This justifies the need for continued research in this area. Moreover, the novelty of the study is the inclusion of POS as a mediator of the SE-BP relationship, which has so far been studied only in other areas of entrepreneurship, such as entrepreneurial leadership (Imran & Aldaas, 2020) or intrapreneurial competencies (Okwor et al., 2022). This approach enables a new perspective on the mechanisms linking SE and BP, extending the current theoretical framework. To the best of the author's knowledge, no previous studies have examined POS as a mediator in this specific context, which makes this investigation a novel contribution to the literature. Although the importance of POS for organizational results, e.g. job performance (Butlewski et al., 2024) and, consequently, BP, has been pointed out, the mediating role of POS between SE and BP has not been confirmed.

Conclusions

In order to endure in today's fiercely competitive business landscapes, organizations must adopt a strategic and entrepreneurial perspective. The pursuit of opportunities and profits is facilitated by the integration of strategy and entrepreneurship (Wijaya, 2023). This is especially important for SMEs, which are the backbone of any economy. The nature of SMEs in terms of size, organizational structure, limited resources, and dependence on owner management provides a better testing ground for SE processes and behaviours (Lyver & Lu, 2018).

The conducted research allowed us to achieve the main objective, which was to identify and analyse the impact of EP on the performance of SMEs, taking into account the mediating effect of POS on this relationship. Statistical analysis also allowed for positive verification of hypotheses H1 and H2.

As a conclusion, it should be stated that SE has a positive impact on BP, which may result in the success of the organization and achieving competitive advantage. At the same time, intra-organizational support may contribute to building an entrepreneurial organization achieving excellent results. However, in the case of SMEs,

the scope and type of support remain controversial, considering the fact that the direct effect of SE-BP is stronger than the indirect effect of SE-POS-BP. This requires further research on entrepreneurship and support in SMEs.

From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of fostering an entrepreneurial orientation in strategic decision-making while simultaneously fostering an organizational climate that offers meaningful support to employees. SME managers should be encouraged to design support systems that are aligned with the company's strategic goals, resources, and industry context. Policymakers can also draw useful lessons from designing support programs for SMEs that consider the interplay between strategic behaviour and internal organizational conditions.

This creates potential directions for future research. Firstly, it would be necessary to separately analyse individual forms of support: financial, non-financial, psychological, etc., to identify forms with the strongest mediating effect in the process of building an entrepreneurial small or medium-sized company with above-average results. In addition, it seems necessary to take into account the specificity of the industry, because the support tools used may differ radically depending on the nature and specificity of the human resources in the organization. Another direction of research may be to extend the current analysis to include the impact of external factors, especially hostile or favourable environments. The research conducted is not free from limitations. Firstly, the SE variable was treated quite generally in the research, which according to some authors may be highly complex and multidimensional. However, for this study, the priority was to place entrepreneurship at the strategic level, which is a certain simplification. Future research could benefit from disaggregating SE into its component dimensions (e.g. innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, strategic renewal), which could reveal more nuanced patterns of impact on firm performance. Another limitation is the size of the research sample in the study, which is not fully representative. Although the results are statistically significant, their generalizability is limited; therefore, further studies with larger and more diverse samples are recommended. Another limitation can be indicated as the post-pandemic period of research, which could have determined the atypicality of the results, hence it would be reasonable to repeat the research in subsequent years. Moreover, the use of cross-sectional data prevents the identification of causal relationships. Repeated studies over a longer period would allow for a more precise assessment of the dynamics between strategic entrepreneurship, organizational support, and performance over time.

Finally, although the structural model confirmed the tested hypotheses, its moderate explanatory power suggests that other relevant factors (e.g. leadership style, organizational learning, external collaboration) should be examined to fully capture the complexity of the SE-BP relationship. Addressing these limitations poses a challenge for the author's future research. Moreover, one of the directions of future research may be an in-depth regional analysis based on case studies, which will allow to capture the contextual conditions of the impact of strategic entrepreneurship on SME performance.

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