

TECHNICAL SKILLS AMONG SMALL-SCALE ENTREPRENEURS IN KAMPALA UGANDA

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Abstract

Utilizing the ex post facto, prospective comparative designs, purposive and stratified random sampling by proportional allocation, this investigation studied 386 small-scale entrepreneurs (SSEs) in Kampala Uganda in these aspects: (1) extent of technical skills possessed and (2) differences in extent of technical skills possessed in terms of gender. The data were elicited using a validated and tested for reliability questionnaire and revealed the following results: the technical skills (mean=3.29; $t_s=5.401$) were moderately possessed; the extent of technical skills possessed differed significantly according to gender (male more than female). Anchored on these findings, the technical skills needed to be more promoted through education and training of small scale entrepreneurs in business skills, legal aspects of the business, marketing and time management.

Keywords: Small scale entrepreneurs; technical skills

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurs today are viewed not only as business founders but more importantly as those who can invent new ways of managing ventures so that they become more competitive and more successful. Owners of existing organizations are also struggling to make their organizations more entrepreneurial (Brown, *et al*, 2001), strategic and competitive (Hitt *et al*, 2001). The need then for the businesses to be managed technically becomes paramount. This has its origin from the fact that the issue of initiation of businesses (whether by entrepreneurs or none) is no longer a problem, since very many people have started; instead the problem is on the survival, productivity, growth and performance of these created ventures. It is important to look at different ways of boosting the performance of these mushrooming enterprises to contribute to national development by taking into considerations their management skills. One type of management skills which is almost a must for all businesses to survive global competition is technical skills, which pertain to how different products are made within the required standards and quality. Technical skills are particularly important for small-scale entrepreneurs (enterprises) to enable them adapt quickly to changing market

needs. While technical skills are generally a constraint among most small-scale entrepreneurs globally, the extent to which they are constrained differs across countries and therefore the approach to provide solutions may also differ. To identify the needs, priority areas and solutions with reference to constraints in technical skills under the Ugandan context, this empirical investigation delved into the extent to which the technical skills were possessed by the small scale entrepreneurs under study and hypothesized that gender, educational level and business form may account for significant differences in technical skills.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Skills

Zuzana and Matej (2007) defined a skill as the ability to smoothly carry out one's roles or activities involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical) and people (interpersonal). For Wickham (2001), a skill is knowledge that is demonstrable by action and ability to perform in a particular way. In a similar fashion, the UK Department of Education defines skills broadly as the ability to perform tasks according to a pre-defined standard of competence (cited in Tustin, 2003). While Al-Madhoun and Analoui (2002), considered a skill as an ability which can be developed and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential but the ability to translate knowledge into practice. Whereas skills are of different types and uses, this study examined managerial skills required in managing businesses of a small size.

2.1.1 Technical Skills

Technical skills refer to one's ability to understand and the proficiency in a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, procedures, or techniques; it involves specialized knowledge, analytical ability within that specialty and ability using tools and techniques of a specific discipline (Katz in Arul, 2009). Vocational and on-job training programs largely do a good job in developing this skill. According to George and Jones (2001) technical skills refer to job specific knowledge and techniques required to perform a role. They depend on the nature of the organisation and task. For example, the owner of a restaurant needs cooking skills, a school director needs teaching skills and so on. In case of any problem, the entrepreneur can fill the gap or identify it. They also help evaluate performance of delegated workers. Other technical skills entrepreneurs need are accounting, book-keeping and budgeting.

Technical skills according to Kunene (2008) are also called vocational skills and refer to those specific skills needed to work within a specific occupation and include expertise, knowledge of the industry, its standards and practices, ability to use tools, procedures and techniques of a specified field, understanding of how specific things work, product/ service specific knowledge that enables one to know what a particular product could do and what it can be used for, process knowledge or how to manufacture relevant products and all steps that need to be taken to develop and produce products or perform tasks necessary to render the service (Tustin, 2003; Perks & Struwig, 2005). Examples of technical skills required by SSEs are those related to job specific knowledge and include professional skills, marketing

skills, bookkeeping skills, budgeting skills, time management skills and legal skills (Zuzana & Matej, 2007).

A. Professional Skills

Professional skills, also called technical or operational skills (Mullins, 2002) are trained abilities that enable a practitioner to perform specific tasks with particular instructions, standards, methods and tools (Bevan, 2002). Having some business training (professional skills) can enhance small-scale entrepreneurs' business management success. Entrepreneurs who are professionals in their business fields have higher chances of performing better than those who are not (Zuzana & Matej, 2007). Bekele and Worku (2008) found out that shortage of professional skills was responsible for about 49% failure of small-scale firms in Ethiopia. Raduan *et al.* (2006) found the same in Malaysia, Audretsch and Lehman (2004), Baghai *et al.* (1999), Smith and Schallenkamp (2005) supplemented these findings, while Chandler and Jansen (1992) argued that as small ventures grow, founding entrepreneurs should be replaced by professional managers. On the other hand, Carol Yen-Yun Lin (1998) concluded that professional skills are critical for short term not long term survival, arguing that in the long run, professional skills need to be supplemented by other management skills, such as motivation, delegation and teamwork. The findings of Davila *et al.* (2003) suggested that professional/or technical skills are a prerequisite to identification of an appropriate opportunity and pursuing it successfully.

B. Marketing Skills

Marketing skills are theorized to have a positive relationship with business management success (Kotler, 1983:6). Schultz and Robinson (1986) showed that Nelson Company's effective marketing strategy increased its sales, profitability and competitiveness in the late 1970's. Marketing skills help to improve product quality and increase customer satisfaction which culminates into increased sales and profits (Price & Ferrell, 2005). Mayanja (2001) noted that only 29% in a sample of 123 self-employed technicians in Kampala, Uganda had sound marketing skills and out of these, 58% were more successful. He also indicated that the other important factor in marketing skills is product pricing. The skills part here is on how to set competitive prices, but which enable a company to make some reasonable profits. Ligthelm and Cant (2002) had also discovered that inappropriate pricing negatively affected the performance of a business venture. Kiwanuka (1998) contends that entrepreneurs who are competitive aggressive, are more likely to succeed than those who are less. Lumpkin and Dess (1996), define competitive aggressiveness as the ability of entrepreneurs to directly and intensely challenge own competitors through cutting prices, spending aggressively on promotions, product or service quality and adopt new competitive marketing strategies all the time. Marketing skills enable an entrepreneur to analyze market opportunities, select target markets, develop marketing mix, identify new markets and customers (through cutting prices, increase advertisement budgets, improving advert message, getting more dealers, review demographic, institutional and geographical markets, change product by size, new packaging,

launch new products etc.) and manage the marketing effort, that enhance survival, increase sales and venture profitability. The report of Mezher *et al* (2008) unearthed internal factors explaining success and failure among small-scale entrepreneurs in Lebanon, indicating that poor product quality is among the most important failure factors. Price and Ferrell (2005) also observed that product quality was a prerequisite for entrepreneurs to enter the market and it was a vital aspect of marketing. In view of this, Nieuwenhuizen and Kroon (2003) agreed with Rogerson (2000a) that technical knowledge is a key factor affecting successful business performance. Cornwall and Naughton (2003) confirmed that entrepreneurs who are incompetent in technical skills cannot be able to create excellent products.

C. Bookkeeping Skills

Bookkeeping refers to a system of recording financial transactions regarding sales, purchases, incomes and payments (Accounting SAGE, 2009). In organizations then, bookkeeping skills therefore refer to the ability of a manager or an entrepreneur to properly record financial transactions regarding sales, purchases, incomes and payments in the organization. Several studies have shown the importance of records management skills in a business (Australian Government, 2009; Bell *et al*, 2008; Linda & Jerry, 1993). In most of these studies, it had been indicated that records management skills help to monitor business health, make vital decisions, manage cash flows and show business financial position to lenders. Bekele and Worku (2008) found that failure to demonstrate standard bookkeeping, auditing and record keeping skills accounted for 54% failure in micro, small and medium enterprises in Ethiopia.

D. Budgeting Skills

Budgeting skills refer to the ability of a business manager to establish and manage budgets that requires some knowledge or skills of finance and accounting principles (Accounting SAGE, 2009). Important in this skill area is the ability to perform cost estimates for project budgeting and understanding the different methods used to determine business costs (Sharpiro, 2001). Such skills range from estimating individual activities and rolling the estimates up to estimating the business cost. Reading and understanding vendor quotes, preparing or overseeing purchase orders, and reconciling invoices are budgeting skills that will be used by a business manager in most entrepreneurial ventures. These costs will be linked back to venture activities and expense items in the budget. Budgeting skills enhance entrepreneurs' ability of setting performance standards, motivate towards goals, metering results and direct attention to more essential areas (Narasimham, 2009). Other studies in this line include Smith and Schallenkamp (2006), Jukes and Bruce (2007), Schallenkamp (2008), Thwala and Mvubu (2008) and Spellman (2009).

E. Time Management Skills

Time management skills thus refer to the ability to know what to do, when and actually do it (Raftorpoulos *et al.*, 2009). Since time is a scarce resource, it is important that small-scale entrepreneurs spend it wisely, as it is irreplaceable, irreversible and for this matter, the business man's proverb "time is money" stands (Inyang & Enuoh, 2009). Since time is money, anybody who does not properly manage it is bound to, not only lose money but also

fail in business. Time management skills increase effectiveness, improve performance and lead to personal development (Sandberg, 2004; Raftorpoulos *et al.*, 2009). Time management skills are crucial for identifying timely market opportunities. In Kampala and Uganda in general several businesses are immensely affected by time and seasons, such that untimely planning may significantly and adversely affect the sales.

F. Legal skills

Legal skills according to Kunene (2008); Finch and Fafinski (2007) and Botha (2006) encompass ability to deal with business forms, contractual laws, business ethics, ability to register trademarks, logos, designs and acquiring licenses. Several researches identify legal skills to be a possible factor affecting entrepreneurial survival and growth; for example, Kunene (2008) found that legal skills enhance success of small and medium enterprises in South Africa; Tobias *et al.* (2008) showed that legal requirements was among the barriers to entrepreneurial growth internationally; Botha (2006) asserted that without legal skills the business may collapse; Tumbunan (2009) found that legal issues are a vital constraint to women entrepreneurs in Indonesia, however Bushe (2007) and Svensson (2008) did not find a significant correlation between the two.

3. Methods and Techniques

This study employed a retrospective-prospective and descriptive comparative survey designs. Data on technical skills possessed were collected by asking individual small business owners and managers to rate themselves on validated researcher devised questionnaire items. The technical skills questionnaire was factor analyzed and Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed using SPSS. The results revealed that all items in the instrument had higher variances which were at least above 50%, indicating that the items were valid in explaining the constructs in the instrument. Results also indicated that the instrument had a high degree of reliability ($0.899 > 0.7$). From a total of 11003, 386 small-scale entrepreneurs, the respondents were selected using purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Mean ratings were computed for each item and compared with respect to gender, business form and level of education using One Way ANOVA.

4. Findings and Interpretations

4.1 Technical Skills Possessed by Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Kampala

Entrepreneurs' technical skills were measured using six components namely; I) marketing skills; II) book keeping skills; III) budgeting skills; IV) time management skills; V) legal skills; and VI) professional skills. For each of these six concepts, entrepreneurs were asked a number of questions related to the concept and they were required to rate themselves on the extent to which they possessed each, on a scale of five points, where 1 represented very little or no skill at all and 5 for very much skills. Their ratings were analyzed using means descriptive statistics as indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations on Extent to Which Technical Skills were possessed by Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Kampala

Types of Technical Skills	Mean	SD	t	Interpretation	R a n k
1. Marketing skills					
Ability to apply competitive strategies (e.g. cutting prices, improve quality, design new products, packages etc, fashion, color, etc.)	3.38	0.800	4.225	Moderate	1
Ability to develop a marketing budget	3.34	0.866	3.857	Moderate	2
Ability to identify new markets and/or customers	3.17	0.879	3.606	Moderate	3
Ability to respond quickly to competitive forces.	3.16	0.834	3.789	Moderate	4
Ability to satisfy customer needs	3.13	0.809	3.869	Moderate	5
Ability to identify customer needs	3.13	0.809	3.869	Moderate	5
Ability to identify competitors' strength and weaknesses	3.12	0.886	3.521	Moderate	7
Average mean	3.21	0.660	4.864	Moderate	
2. Book keeping skills					
Ability to prepare financial documents (cash books, petty books, journals, ledgers & bank reconciliations)	3.37	2.416	1.395	Moderate	1
Ability to manage cash flows (income & expenditure)	3.21	0.847	3.790	Moderate	2
Ability to audit & understand business financial position	3.21	0.824	3.896	Moderate	2
Average mean	3.26	1.074	3.035	Moderate	
3. Budgeting skills					
Ability to set performance goals and standards	3.46	0.980	3.531	High	1
Ability to evaluate results basing on budgetary goals	3.27	0.835	3.916	Moderate	2
Ability to prioritize according to goals and objectives	3.26	0.800	4.075	Moderate	3
Average mean	3.33	0.762	4.370	Moderate	
4. Time management skills					
Ability to time table tasks and activities (determine what activity to do & when)	3.37	0.824	4.090	Moderate	1
Ability to apply time saving measures (e.g. quick decision making, clear delegation)	3.21	0.781	4.110	Moderate	2
Ability to meet deadlines and appointments.	3.14	0.826	3.801	Moderate	3
Average mean	3.24	0.687	4.716	Moderate	

5. Legal skills					
Ability to understand rights & consumer protection law	3.25	0.938	3.465	Moderate	1
Ability to deal with business legal forms, contracts & laws	3.18	0.943	3.372	Moderate	2
Ability to register business trademarks & acquire licenses	3.13	1.025	3.054	Moderate	3
Average mean	3.19	0.790	4.038	Moderate	
6. Professional Skills					
You have adequate training in line with this business	3.66	1.057	3.463	High	1
You have adequate qualifications in line with the business you are doing	3.41	1.206	2.828	High	2
You have ever worked in a similar business related to the one you currently own	3.40	1.128	3.014	Moderate	3
Average mean	3.49	0.879	3.970	High	
Overall mean	3.29	0.611	5.385	Moderate	

Entrepreneurs in Kampala were found to possess a relatively moderate level of technical skills, but with high professional skills and low legal skills. The problem of inadequate technical skills has been documented in many parts of the world. For example, Kunene (2008) noted inadequate technical skills among small and medium entrepreneurs in South Africa. The same results were earlier revealed by Botha (2006), Berreira (2004) and Bosma *et al.* (2000).

Basil (2005) found low levels of records or bookkeeping skills in Nigeria. He also found an inadequacy in other aspects of technical skills such as professionalism (where many Small-scale entrepreneurs are lacking relevant training in their fields of operation), financial or budgeting skills, marketing and legal skills. While this problem has been well documented, Bosma *et al.* (2000) showed that financial management skills are a necessity for entrepreneurial success and unfortunately they found them inadequate among small scale ventures in Netherlands, explaining their low level of success. This (and other similar ones) implies that the level of technical skills required for small-scale entrepreneurs success should be beyond moderate, an indication that the level of technical skills for small-scale entrepreneurs in Kampala is still below the required level for business venture success.

4.2 Differences in Technical Skills Possessed by Male and Female Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Kampala

As indicated in Table 2, the following types of technical skills significantly differed between male and female entrepreneurs with male entrepreneurs dominating in all the skills in question; i) Budgeting skills ($t=3.455$, $sig.=0.001$); ii) Time management skills ($t=3.391$, $sig.=0.001$); iii) Legal skills ($t=4.202$, $sig.=0.000$); iv) professional skills ($t=3.002$, $sig.=0.000$); the overall technical skills significantly differed ($t=3.944$, $sig.=0.000$).

Table 2:T-test results for Differences in Technical Skills Possessed by Male and Female Small-scale Entrepreneurs

Types of Technical Skills	sex	Mean	t- value	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on H _o
1. Marketing Skills	Male	3.27	1.860	0.064	No significant difference	Accepted
	Female	3.13				
2. Bookkeeping Skills	Male	3.31	1.262	0.208	No significant difference	Accepted
	Female	3.19				
3. Budgeting Skills	Male	3.45	3.455	0.001	Significant difference	Rejected
	Female	3.17				
4. Time Mgt Skills	Male	3.34	3.391	0.001	Significant difference	Rejected
	Female	3.10				
5. Legal Skills	Male	3.34	4.202	0.000	Significant difference	Rejected
	Female	2.98				
6. Professional Skills	Male	3.61	3.002	0.003	Significant difference	Rejected
	Female	3.33				
7. Technical Skills	Male	3.41	3.944	0.000	Significant difference	Rejected
	Female	3.15				
Overall Technical Skills	Male	3.41	3.944	0.000	Significant difference	Rejected
	Female	3.15				

The findings revealed that men possessed technical skills more than women. Men usually acquire more education than women; they tend to go in for more specialized courses, where such skills are trained and acquired. Similarly, men tend to take part in business related activities and get experience required to do a particular job compared to women. Tajaddini *et al* (2011) indicated that men have significantly higher levels of technical skills than women in Iran, while Kaifi and Mujtaba (2010a) found the same in Afghanistan and similar results were found in India, USA and UK (Kaifi & Mujtaba, 2011). Similar reasons were given in almost all these studies explaining differences according to gender, suggesting that there is need for women entrepreneurs in Uganda to go for more education.

In many parts of the world (Uganda inclusive), various socioeconomic factors are responsible for women's lower educational and managerial skills attainment, including direct costs, the

need for female labor, low expected returns and social restrictions (Ghosh & Bharati, 2005). Such differences explain differences in managerial skills possessed which are critical in effective management of a business venture. Further, shared values tend to regularize human behavior and make individuals more predictable. A study by Munene *et al* (2000) concluded that the African and Asian cultures tend to emphasize hierarchy, paternalism, and mastery in contrast to egalitarianism, autonomy and harmony. As a matter of fact, the position of women in traditional African societies can be measured by their autonomy in decision making and by the degree of access they have to the outside world (Ghosh & Bharati, 2005). Moreover, Asian and African managers often stress reliance on formal rules and superiors in reaching decisions as compared with the cultural profile of people in the United States or most European countries (Kaifi & Mujtaba, 2011).

4. Conclusions

Kampala SSEs have moderate technical skills. Most small-scale entrepreneurs in Kampala are professionals in their business fields, however, the business technical skills are still missing. Business technical skills are very vital if the venture is to succeed, therefore, other technical business skills should be harnessed like business legal matters (business registration, acquiring licenses and dealing with agreements and contracts), marketing (how to identify competitors' strengths and weaknesses, identifying and satisfying customer needs, quick response to competitive forces and identifying new markets), time management and bookkeeping.

5. Recommendations

There is need for the Government of Uganda to promote more women entrepreneurs in Kampala, in order to promote gender equality in business and economic growth. This study found that men dominate women in ownership of small-scale enterprises. There is need to educate small-scale entrepreneurs in Kampala on formation of joint ventures as well as trainings in these areas: (1) legal aspects of their business, more especially on business registration procedures and how to deal with business legal forms, contracts and laws; for example they need to be taught on how to formulate partnerships and joint stock companies, how to develop and design legal documents like partnership deeds, articles and memorandum of associations; (2) time management such as on how to meet deadlines and appointments; (3) marketing in the angle of how to identify their competitors' strengths and weaknesses, customer needs and how to satisfy them. Special entrepreneurial training sessions for women on the basics of business such as how to make business plans, how to make departments and how to delegate effectively, are also recommended; more skills on how to register businesses and acquiring licenses; more time management skills such as how to fulfill schedules, meeting deadlines and appointments and applying time saving measures. Women entrepreneurs' associations should help women by highlighting the procedures of registering a business, printing them on posters and the like.

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