

A Perspective of South Africa: Integrating Values, Entrepreneurial Competencies and Sustainable Development

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Abstract: A compelling call has become apparent to ensure global safety interventions and actions focused on the preservation of human, social, economic, and environmental development. At the core of inclusive economic development are Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) as these businesses are responsive to social needs and environmental issues. Despite the triple challenge of government intervention, many SMMEs fail in the early years of business formation as a result of their incapability to integrate their values, and entrepreneurial competencies that ensure sustainable development. This study aims to ascertain how values of entrepreneurial competency influence sustainable development. The study adopted a positivist research paradigm through a quantitative approach; therefore, a structured questionnaire was used to obtain data from 400 entrepreneurs through convenience sampling and was analysed using SPSS (version 26). Also, structural relationships between the variables were tested using SEM. Honesty; Integrity; and Transparency occurred as the essential values that entrepreneurs should possess while Accountability; Social Interaction and Personal Identity were conceptualised as key competencies. Important findings from the structural model revealed that honesty and transparency do not influence accountability. Correspondingly, personal identity does not influence integrity whereas integrity has a significant effect on social interaction. Furthermore, accountability does not have a significant impact on either poverty alleviation or the creation of employment opportunities. This study concluded that integrity is more important to society than anything else, and this finding should be taken seriously.

Keywords: Values, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Sustainable development, SMMEs

Introduction

Developed and developing countries are concerned with maintaining and expanding their economies, as people face persistent extreme hardship. Prominent problems to sustainable development include political unrest and conflict, climate change, diseases, hunger, poverty, joblessness, aggression, and greediness. Thus, people's sustenance is based on their responsibility for sustainability (Aka, 2019). The study conducted by Heggen, Sandset, and Engebretsen (2020) revealed that monitoring the environment is one of the main objectives of sustainable development. This includes making sure that people's dwellings are suitable for living. Despite this emphasis, there is currently global trepidation on how to ensure sustainable development since it permeates every aspect of societal endeavour and poses a threat to the environmental, social, economic, political, cultural, and technical environments as well as the planet and man. Moreover, the continual daily growth in the world population makes natural resources inadequate while they are unable to satisfy the needs of the populace (Erul, Woosnam, & McIntosh, 2020).

Uduji Okolo-Obasi, and Asongu (2021) stress that the dynamic changes brought about by globalisation and multinational competitiveness in the business sector have made moral values essential. The extreme levels of poverty in zones, areas, and territories are of utmost concern to governments and the populace alike, as they work to enhance their standard of life and economic circumstances, especially since sustainable development is garnering widespread attention. South Africa, like other nations worldwide, aspires to advance sustainable development (Nkhabu, 2021).

Among the planned strategies implemented by the government to make the goals of sustainable development realizable is the empowerment of SMMEs. As stated by Rizqi, Pratikto, and Kusdiyanti, (2022) these enterprises are acknowledged because of the significant role they play in fostering growth, influencing innovation, increasing productivity as well as GDP. Despite taking risks with production elements such as land, labour, capital, and technology to make positive contributions to environmental development, internal and external environmental factors have impeded the growth of SMMEs, making it more difficult for them to succeed and thrive (Rizqi, Pratikto, & Kusdiyanti, 2022). The internal factors preventing SMME business growth as stated by Huynh (2022) are poor inventory control, poor technological skills, poor credit records, a lack of business management training, a lack of management competency, poor access to financing, and poor financial management. Similarly, bureaucracy, governmental policy, and labour laws are examples of impediments linked to external factors. Regional disparities play a significant role in shaping opportunities for entrepreneurship and sustainable development, as local contexts can either enable or hinder access to resources and training (Mthuli & Biyela, 2019). When it comes to making moral decisions about both favourable and unfavourable matters for the sake of progress, entrepreneurs behave poorly (Borah, Iqbal & Akhtar, 2022).

The use of values by entrepreneurs should receive more attention, according to Iwara (2024), who suggests that this is the best way to develop competence in members of the communities of practice. At every service level, where entrepreneurs can make a substantial contribution to sustainable development, this will enable the professional spirit to be demonstrated for specialisation and market capture. Due to operational uncertainties such as financial difficulties, a lack of expertise, a lack of experience, and so forth, SMMEs in South Africa and other parts of the world are vulnerable to business management risks. This effect can be associated with moral incoherence in the management structure (Iwara, 2024).

Environmental changes as observed by Udeagha and Muchapondwa (2023) have drawn problems and attention, that South African towns are currently confronting. Local governments are compelled by this circumstance to address environmental challenges by virtue of their duty to guarantee that all residents have access to essential services. This effect has revealed the importance of environmental adaptation in South Africa and the necessity for all to be actively involved in the formulation of national policy.

In light of the aforementioned, it is imperative to join efforts to resolve environmental adversities that distress the lives of people. On this note, this study aims to ascertain how values of entrepreneurial competency influence sustainable development. This research is required to ensure that these SMMEs are on the right track for successful innovations and, eventually, sustainability.

Literature review

Values in a general view are the distinctive beliefs in justice, fairness, honesty, and transparency that motivate and direct people to act or behave in a particular way (Colaco & Loi, 2019). In operational encounters, people are prone to adopting the values of their society, which they have been nurtured with, and believe these to be right. To make good decisions, they frequently evaluate values towards one another and choose which values to foster (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2020). Likewise in the business world, Feldman (2021) notes that values give both entrepreneurs and employees direction, control, and a sense of security in their functional roles. In the study conducted by van Wyk and Venter (2022) on values, it was found that people with good values are more likely to make the right decisions that support the accomplishment of corporate goals and objectives. Dewi (2023) shares a similar opinion with van Wyk and Venter (2022) that values reflect people's beliefs about what is good or wrong, and what should exist or not. A person's or an organization's values are the deliberate acts that influence their ethical conduct and the things that they hold dear and find essential to their existence and daily functioning. Entrepreneurs and work managers need to set an example for others by modelling characteristics like honesty, integrity, fairness, transparency, and reliability (Roldan, Giraldo, & Santana, 2023). This will help them win people over, earn their trust, and build positive relationships that govern day-to-day activities.

Monavvarifard, and Salehi (2022) argue that managing an enterprise requires more than just values from entrepreneurs. In addition to values, this requires competencies to handle the affairs of the business. Competencies as described by Ferdousi and Abedin (2023) are the key qualities that an individual possesses to carry out work duties. These include knowledge, skills, experience, and

abilities. Constant implementation of competencies can improve service conditions, lower general business risks, improve decision-making skills, and facilitate simpler staffing and talent retention in the workplace (Phillips, 2023). In other words, an entrepreneur's competencies are a collection of qualities that set the business apart from its competitors. When competencies are implemented appropriately, an organisation will gain from the skills of its employees or teams (Hanifah, Purnomo, & Dai 2024). The adoption of skills within the work system enhances employee optimism and well-being. To go beyond the sustainability statement and work on a more significant strategy for sustainable development, it is necessary to define this concept Pennetta, Anglani, and Mathews (2024).

Sustainable development as described by Mensah (2019) is the process of fulfilling many human needs while utilising the earth's natural resources from the natural, social, and economic environment to improve their living conditions without denying future generations the opportunity to meet their own needs in terms of time, space, and way of life. Ruggerio (2021) views sustainable development as the development that calls for integrating development at the local, national, and international levels to provide individuals in the community with a decent standard of living. Hummels and Argyrou, (2021) add to the opinion of Ruggerio (2021) that sustainable development is a methodical strategy for reorganising environmental inequalities, including unemployment, poverty, and insecurity, among others, to improve income and wealth distribution and foster national economic self-reliance. The values perspective of sustainable development was introduced by Carlsen and Bruggemann (2022), who assert that SMMEs can achieve success and support economic growth as long as they implement moral management practices for their organisational resources. These consist of human, informational, financial, and physical resources. This is supported by Fang, Liu, and Putra (2022) research, which discovered that workplace values are a crucial component in connecting profit and sustainable development in the workplace.

Zhang and Dilanchiev (2022) stress the importance of maximising economic wealth through the efficient use of organisational resources. The social, economic, and environmental pillars are the main pillars of sustainable development resources. Since factors that affect the natural environment are ever-changing, SMMEs can help reform the areas in which they operate by using their competencies and values to address problems like pollution, deforestation, ozone depletion, and climate change (Chien, Chau & Sadiq, 2023). People can gain from social justice, human and labour rights, community development, and social equity through SMMEs' social relationship competency (Nogueira, Gomes & Lopes, 2024). They can also foster genuine understanding in situations where positive values of mutual respect and trust are fostered (Manyaga, Goldman & Thomas, 2024).

With the rapid pace of change, innovative approaches to its management are required. The present environment is undergoing a rapid transition due to factors that keep emerging from environmental, social and economic factors. This calls for entrepreneurs to become knowledgeable about societal growth and their role in bringing about change inside their organisations. Through the use of their competencies, SMMEs can make a significant contribution to their environment by managing, directing, and leading others.

Hypotheses

The study's hypotheses were developed in response to the secondary research themes. They were then represented in a hypothesised model and tested using the structural equation model (SEM).

The principles of honesty, integrity, transparency, and fairness are most encountered when analysing scholarly ideas of values and how they affect entrepreneurial competencies. Accountability, Social Interaction, and Personal Identity have been identified as the three main competencies that can influence sustainable growth. The reduction of poverty and the creation of job opportunities were identified as the primary measures of sustainable development in societies. Research hypotheses as stated by Bell et al. (2022) can be categorised into null and alternative hypotheses and can be derived from the study's objectives or research questions. The null hypothesis is the type of hypothesis that is most frequently tested since it represents the opposite of reality. All the following hypotheses were developed for this study based on the secondary research questions:

Hypothesis 1

Null hypothesis

There is no relationship between honesty and accountability

Alternative hypothesis

Honesty is positively related to accountability

Hypothesis 2

Null hypothesis

There is no relationship between personal identity and integrity

Alternative hypothesis

Personal identity is positively related to integrity.

Hypothesis 3

Null hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between accountability and poverty alleviation.

Alternative hypothesis

There is a positive relationship between accountability and poverty alleviation.

Hypothesis 4

Null hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between social interaction and integrity.

Alternative hypothesis

Social interaction is positively related to integrity.

Hypothesis 5

Null hypothesis

Transparency does not influence accountability positively.

Alternative hypothesis

There is a positive relationship between transparency and accountability.

Hypothesis 6

Null hypothesis

There is no significant influence between accountability and employment opportunities.

Alternative hypothesis

Accountability is positively related to employment opportunities.

Methods

This study aimed to ascertain how values of entrepreneurial competency influence sustainable development. Accordingly, the study employed quantitative research design, which is well-suited for providing a detailed understanding of how values of entrepreneurial competency influence sustainable development. This is appropriate for this study because it provides a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the research topic and related data (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). The positivist epistemological stance underpins this research, enabling the quantification and objective analysis of the relationship between values, competencies, and sustainable development. SMMEs that were registered and situated in the eThekweni Municipal area made up the study's target demographic. Through convenience sampling, a structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the 400 entrepreneurs in the sample. SEM was utilised to examine the structural relationships between the variables after the data was collected. SPSS was utilized for preliminary data analysis,

including descriptive statistics to summarize responses. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between variables, offering insights into both direct and indirect effects. The study adhered to ethical research principles, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring anonymity, and safeguarding collected data

Results

The results of the data collection from 400 registered SMMEs regarding their values and skills and how they affect sustainable development are presented and discussed here.

5.1 addressing research question one

The purpose of the first question was to determine whether an entrepreneur's honesty influenced their accountability. The following presents and discusses the remarks made and the answers to this question.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between honesty and accountability

Table 1 shows that 51% of the respondents concur that they make their decisions on the evidence of what they think to be the truth at work. Also, 51% agree that their company's planning is grounded in factual information rather than opinion. Fifty-two percent agree that honesty is the foundation of their company's sales force objective, which is to increase profitability. Similarly, 58% of respondents said they are open in their opinions regardless of what others may think.

Table 1: Relationship between honesty and accountability

Response SA %	SD D NS A				
Agreement					
I base my actions on the evidence of what I believe is the truth at my workplace.	6	2	1	192176	51
Planning in my business is based on facts and not sentiment.	-	3	9	192173	51
The development of the sales force objective of my enterprise is built on the platform of honesty to boost my profitability.	3	10	8	196160	52
I am straightforward when expressing my opinion irrespective of what other people can say.	1	1	-	219156	58

Source: Author's construction

Table 2: Means, medians and standard deviations of accountability and honesty

The mean scores for honesty and accountability are both over the 3.5 threshold, indicating that most respondents agreed with the measurements.

Constructs deviation	Mean	Median	Standard
Accountability	4,42	4,20	0,423
Honesty	4,39	4,25	0,511

Source: Author's construction

Table 3: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis one conclusion

Conclusion: Honesty has no discernible impact on accountability because its p-value (0.436) is higher than 0.055. As a result, increasing honesty won't necessarily increase accountability. This hypothesis is thus rejected.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Estimate	P-Value
Accountability	Honesty	0.055	0.436

Source: Author's construction

5.2 Addressing research question two

Question two aimed to evaluate how the Personal Identity of entrepreneurs impacts their Integrity. The responses to this question and the outcomes of the assessed hypothesis are stated below:

Hypothesis 2: Personal identity is positively related to integrity

According to Table 4, 49% of research participants say they are confident in their knowledge and abilities, and 53% say they are self-directed and capable of making their judgements. In addition, 58% of respondents say they have the drive and energy to accomplish their goals, both personal and professional, and 53% think they can remain calm, think clearly under pressure, and control their negative emotions.

Table 4: Relationship between personal identity and integrity

Response	SD	D	NS	A	SA	% Agreement
I have confidence in my skills and abilities	10	6	1	184	176	49
I believe that I am self-directed and can make independent decisions	10	7	1	198	161	53
I believe that I possess enough energy and motivation to achieve my professional and personal goals	8	3	3	217	146	58
I believe that I can maintain composure, think rationally under stress, and keep negative emotions under control	13	7	12	200	145	53

Source: Author's construction

Table 5: Means, medians and standard deviations for integrity and personal identity

The respondents agreed with the assertions to assess both personal identity and integrity, as indicated by the mean values, which are over 3.5.

Constructs	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
INTEGRITY	4.29	4.00	0.504
PERSONAL IDENTITY	4.29	4.25	0.640

Source: Author's construction

Table 6: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis two conclusion

Integrity from Table 6 has no discernible impact on personal identity because its p-value (0.063) is higher than 0.05. Thus, increasing integrity will not result in an increase in personal identity. This hypothesis is thus rejected.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Estimate	P-Value
Integrity	Personal Identity	0.159	0.063

Source: Author's construction

5.3 Addressing research question three

The third research question sought to ascertain whether accountability had an impact on poverty alleviation; the findings are described and provided below, along with the hypothesis that was evaluated.

Hypothesis 3: Accountability and poverty reduction are positively correlated

Of the 377 participants, 27% agree that they are involved in social responsibility activities, such as teaching underprivileged individuals; 25% say they attend public enlightenment workshops on developing entrepreneurial skills; 4% encourage young people to pursue careers that provide more employment opportunities; 24% say they collaborate with the local government and other organisations on job creation projects; and 16% sponsor community-based projects that aim to lower crime in our community.

Table 7: Relationship between accountability and poverty alleviation

Response	SD	D	NS	A	SA	%	Agreement
I am involved in social responsibility initiatives such as the education of disadvantaged people	113	85	10	102	67	27	
I participate in public enlightenment workshops on entrepreneurial skills development	112	99	8	93	65	25	
I inspire the youths to invest in careers that offer more employment opportunities	8	75	3	14	76	4	
I am a partner with the local municipality and other institutions on job creation projects.	113	103	7	92	64	24	
I sponsor community-based projects that are aimed at reducing crime in our community	96	135	10	62	64	16	

Source: Author's construction

Table 8: Means, medians and standard deviations for accountability and poverty alleviation

The calculated mean values for poverty alleviation and accountability were 2.80 and 4.42, respectively. Since the overall mean (M=2.80) score falls between 2.5 and 3.4, the results indicate that most respondents tend to neither agree nor disagree with the propositions of poverty alleviation.

Constructs	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
ACCOUNTABILITY	4.42	4.20	0.423

POVERTY ALLEVIATION	2.80	2.60	1.305
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Source: Author's construction

Table 9: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis three conclusion

Accountability has no appreciable effect on lowering poverty, as evidenced by its p-value of 0.464, which is larger than 0.05. This suggests that increasing accountability will not result in poverty reduction. This hypothesis is therefore negated.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Estimate	P-Value
Poverty	Accountability	0,043	0,464

Source: Author's construction

5.4 Addressing research question four

The fourth study question enquired if social interaction is a factor in establishing integrity. The results and the evaluated hypothesis are described and provided below to provide proof of this effect.

Hypothesis 4: Social interaction is positively related to integrity

52% of respondents believe that cultivating positive relationships with their staff has made it simpler to achieve organisational objectives, according to the table below. 47% of respondents say that having open lines of contact with their coworkers has made their workplace a trustworthy one. 46% say they set aside time to coach new hires. Additionally, 35% concur that involving their staff has improved their ability to cope with stress. 43% concur that social media technologies provide information about business development to the local community.

Table 10: Relationship between social interaction and integrity

Response	SD	D	NS	A	SA	% Agreement
Fostering good relations with my employees has made it easy to realize organizational goals	13	28	15	197	124	52
Constant communication with my co-workers has created an environment of mutual trust in my business	15	59	18	177	108	47
I make time to mentor new employees	16	76	17	173	95	46
Involving my employees has helped me manage my stress levels	38	120	4	132	86	35
The local community is informed about business development through social media technologies	43	56	11	163	104	43

Source: Author's construction

Table 11: Means, medians and standard deviations for integrity and social interaction

The findings indicate that respondents usually agree with the claims about social interaction because the Integrity (M=4.29) and overall mean (M=3.68) scores are higher than the acceptable threshold of 3.5.

Constructs deviation	Mean	Median	Standard
SOCIAL INTERACTION	3,68	4,00	0.954
INTEGRITY	4,29	4,00	0.504

Source: Author's construction

Table 12: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis four conclusion

Integrity's p-value (0.005) is less than 0.05. This indicates that it has a substantial and positive ($\beta=0.253$) impact on social interaction. According to this, there is a 99 percent possibility that Social Interaction will rise by 25.3% of Integrity's standard deviation for every standard deviation Integrity rises. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Estimate	P-Value
Social Interaction	Integrity	0,253	0,005

Source: Author's construction

5.5 Addressing research question five

The fifth question of this study was aimed at assessing whether Transparency affects Accountability. The replies to the assertions inquired are shown and conversed hereunder as well as the findings of the tested hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between transparency and accountability

According to 52% of the respondents, they avoid making ludicrous assertions that could harm their company's reputation. 54% of respondents think they carefully adhere to the laws governing the day-to-day operations of their company, and 51% agree that exhibiting an honest approach has drawn personnel with similar outlooks to theirs. 58% of respondents state that they provide their clients with high-quality services as a symbolic depiction of reality and an accurate assessment of their company's worth. 51% of respondents also said they can use words and deeds to establish a believable character.

Table 13: Relationship between transparency and accountability

Response	SD	D	NS	A	SA	% Agreement
I do not make outrageous claims that can damage the reputation of my business	-	4	5	196	172	52
Displaying an attitude of honesty has attracted employees of similar outlook to my business	1	11	14	205	143	54
I comply strictly with the laws regulating the operational activities of my business	-	7	25	193	152	51
I offer quality services to my clients as a symbolic representation of truth and accurate valuation of my business	-	2	4	219	152	58
I have built a credible character through my words and actions	-	1	9	194	173	51

Source: Author's construction

Table 14: Means, medians and standard deviations of transparency and accountability

Transparency (M=4.36) and overall mean (M=4.42) are both above the acceptable threshold of 3.5, so the majority of respondents agreed with the assertions regarding accountability.

Constructs	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
ACCOUNTABILITY	4,42	4,20	0,423
TRANSPARENCY	4,36	4,20	0,499

Source: Author's construction

Table 15: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis five conclusion

The p-value (0.818) is higher than 0.05, indicating that transparency has a negative and non-significant impact on accountability. It follows that increasing transparency will not necessarily result in increased accountability. Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Estimate	P-Value
Accountability	Transparency	0,021	0,818

Source: Author's construction

5.6 Addressing research question six

The sixth research question of the study assessed the subject of whether accountability, has an impact on Employment opportunities. To observe whether individuals with accountability are vulnerable to informing and justifying job outcomes, the under-listed assertions were designed. The outcomes of the hypothesis evaluated in this regard are presented below.

Hypothesis 6: Accountability has a bearing on the creation of job opportunities

The outcome from Table 16 shows that 23% agree that they continuously expand their business interests by starting other small entities. 20% state that they arrange computer training courses for both the employees and young people from the communities around them. 44% state that they use information technology methods to advertise their businesses effectively and most of them say their computer knowledge has helped them penetrate communities outside their area. 46% agree that they encourage their employees to come up with new business ideas by giving a prize to the winning idea.

Table 16: Relationship between accountability and job opportunities

Response	SD	D	NS	A	SA	% Agreement
I continuously expand my business interests by starting other small entities	117	83	11	88	78	23
I arrange computer training courses for both my employees and young people from the community	128	108	6	75	68	20
I use information technology methods to advertise my business effectively	55	31	4	164	123	44
My computer knowledge has helped me penetrate outside my area.	55	31	4	164	123	44
I encourage my employees to come up with new business ideas by giving a prize to the winning idea	15	9	4	173	176	46

Source: Author's construction

Table 17: Means, medians, standard deviations for accountability and employment opportunities

Table 17 shows that Accountability has a total mean of (M=4,42) score, which is above 3,5, the results show that most respondents seem to agree with the statements measuring Accountability. However, most respondents seem to neither agree nor disagree with the statements on the construct of Employment opportunities because the overall mean (M=3,48) score is below acceptable thresholds of 3,5.

Constructs deviation	Mean	Median	Standard
ACCOUNTABILITY	4,42	4,20	0,423
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	3,48	3,40	0,995

Source: Author's construction

Table 18: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis six conclusion

The indication from Table 18 shows that accountability does not have a significant impact on employment opportunities as its p-value (0.390) is greater than 0.05. This implies improving Accountability will not translate to improvement of Employment opportunities. Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Estimate	P-Value
Employment Opportunities	Accountability	0,050	0,390

5.7 Structural model analysis

Reliability and validity were assessed about data accuracy. Pearson's coefficient result correlations were analysed to assess the relationship between the study's variables. Similarly, SEM was used to evaluate how well the structural and quantitative models worked. Following the testing of hypotheses, the evaluation proceeded, and the findings indicated that Integrity significantly and favourably affects Social Interaction. The following hypothesised relationships were not supported: accountability and employment possibilities; accountability and poverty reduction; accountability and transparency; honesty and accountability; and personal identity and integrity.

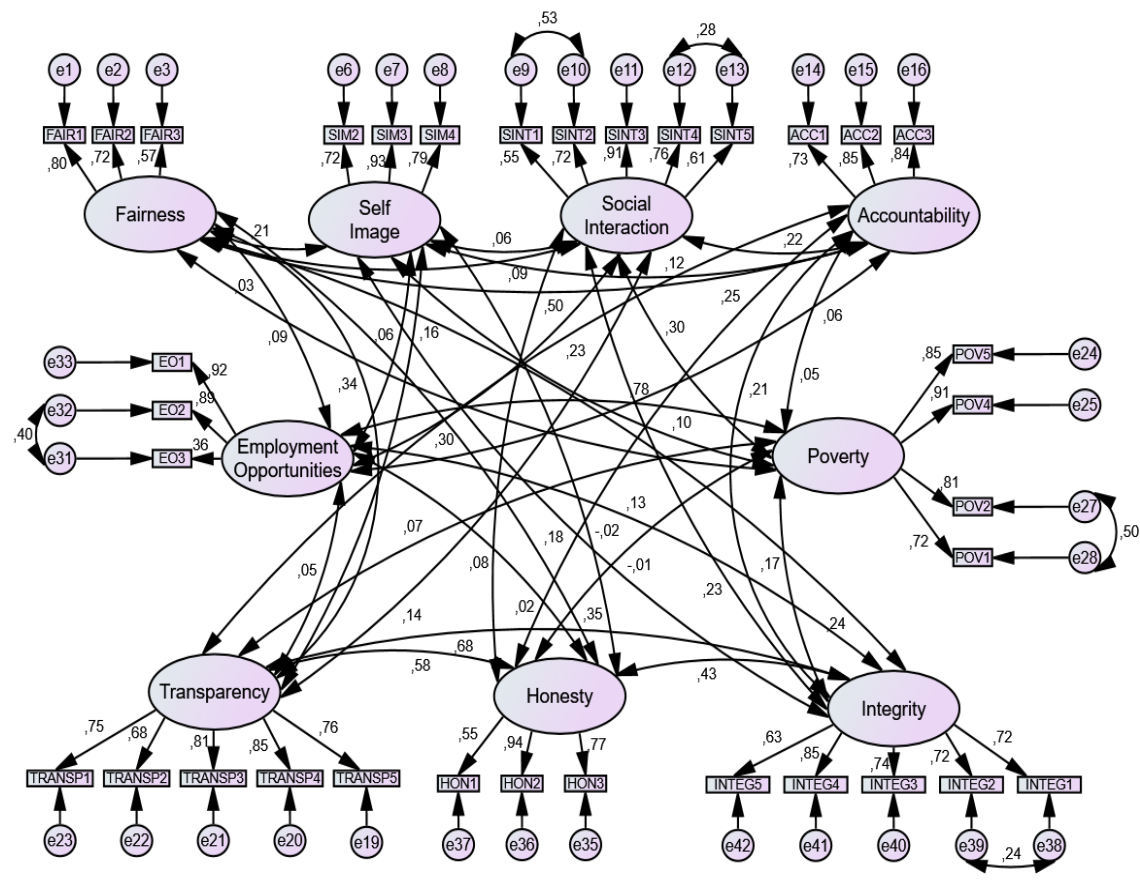


Figure 1: Structural equation model path diagram

Source: Author's Construction

Discussion

In this study, we examined how values of entrepreneurial competency influence sustainable development. To assess the hypotheses, SEM was implemented to evaluate the relationships between the variables of the study. When addressing the first question of the study to show the relationship between honesty and accountability, our results found that honesty has no impact on accountability because its p-value (0.436) is higher than 0.055. As a result, increasing honesty will not necessarily increase accountability. Siagian, Tarigan, and Jie (2021) point out that having something positive to say makes it simpler to show honesty. However, when being honest means expressing an expression that may be difficult to hear, many individuals experience some degree of anxiety when they accept or display it. When a person or organisation speaks dishonestly, the listener might think that they are unreliable. In response to the study's second question, which enquired whether integrity and personal identity are positively correlated, the responses to this question and the outcomes of the assessed hypothesis revealed that integrity from Table 6 has no impact on personal identity because its p-value (0.063) is higher than 0.05. Thus, increasing integrity will not result in an increase in personal identity. Baskaran (2019: 334) explains that an entrepreneur's personal identity might hinder their ability to do their job. Negative influences can have a detrimental impact on an entrepreneur's business and self-esteem. Occasionally, this can result in fatal effects because entrepreneurs may be inspired to make self-destructive acts, such as mistreating or injuring others when personal identity issues arise. The third research question was undertaken to ascertain if accountability had an impact on poverty alleviation. Indication from Table 9 showed that accountability has no appreciable effect in lowering poverty, as evidenced by its p-value of 0.464, which is larger than 0.05. This implies that increasing accountability will not result in poverty reduction. This hypothesis is therefore negated. Environmental issues can manifest

as temporary or permanent changes to the environment, examples of which are rapid urbanisation, deforestation, rising global temperatures, global warming, water scarcity, species extinction, biodiversity loss, carbon pollution, consumerism, and more (Lateh, 2018: 2). Human activity is largely to blame for these problems, which lead to poverty that may be reversible (Korosteleva & Stępień-Baig 2020). The information entrepreneurs may use to help persons living in poverty have a meaningful life and make a living to sustain their existence is the key to solving environmental problems, rather than viewing them as a market for products (Uduji, Okolo-Obasi & Asongu 2021). Question four of the study was assessed to determine whether social interaction plays a role in building integrity. Integrity's p-value (0.005) as shown in Table 12 is less than 0.05. This indicates that it has a substantial and positive ($\beta=0.253$) impact on social interaction. According to this, there is a 99 percent possibility that Social Interaction will rise by 25.3% of Integrity's standard deviation for every standard deviation Integrity rises. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted. The study's fifth question was evaluated to determine whether transparency had an impact on accountability. The fact that the p-value (0.818) is greater than 0.05 as shown in Table 15 suggests that accountability is negatively and non-significantly impacted by transparency. The last hypothesis was evaluated as to whether accountability has a bearing on the creation of job opportunities. The indication from Table 18 shows that accountability does not have a significant impact on employment opportunities as its p-value (0.390) is greater than 0.05. This implies improving accountability will not translate to an improvement in Employment opportunities. Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

The observed variables in our study showed a consistent pattern of improper accountability in the conduct and operations of SMMEs. Surprisingly, the findings confirm our expectations with the study of Eissa, Lester and Gupta, (2020) who hold that the foundation of any successful organisation is accountability. It guarantees that people and groups accept accountability for their choices, actions, and the results that follow. Lack of accountability, however, can result in bad values that restrain development, discourage workers, and undermine organisational trust. Also, our findings confirmed an unexpected outcome as the respondents acknowledged that integrity has a positive correlation with social interaction. This supports the opinion that people with integrity have a strong ethical compass in the workplace. Even when doing so requires being understanding or making tough choices, they fulfil their commitments, take full responsibility for their actions, and behave ethically (Muo & Azeez, 2019). Without integrity in the encounter, entrepreneurs risk losing their reputations. On the other hand, integrity in social interactions can give entrepreneurs hope and commercial chances (Schaefer & Bouwmeester 2021).

In our case, a better way to improve accountability in the workplace is to make people accountable every time work is to be done. Entrepreneurs should embrace integrity as their corporate culture because it builds confidence and gives employees the sense that they are working for an organisation with higher moral values, encouraging them to be committed and have an interest in the mission, pursuit, and objectives of their enterprise (Wasim & Rehman, 2022). Additionally, employees will be dedicated to the process when their leaders continuously keep them informed and convey work stratagems, values, and the reality of the current situation. Employees will be more likely to complete particular tasks if they are advised of their responsibilities (Noy & Zhang, 2023). The success of an entrepreneur's business may be significantly influenced by social contact. Therefore, ambitious entrepreneurs and people with a solid, respectable background must honestly consider their social competence. By identifying areas that need improvement, entrepreneurs can improve their social skills, which may be preventing them from advancing in the corporate sector (Maaitah, 2023).

Conclusion

In this study, we assess the relationship between values, entrepreneurial competencies and sustainable development in South Africa. Our results show that SMMEs by being accountable as instruments of transformation could help to create the broad improvements needed to create sustainable development by changing their behaviour and embracing positive values that other people can emulate. They can use their value expressly integrity to advance social progress and generate income from their businesses. The ability of entrepreneurs to identify people's needs and introduce novel concepts to the market is essential to their endeavours in creating a thriving company. Entrepreneurs can employ their values and competencies to bring about social change that leads to community development and a higher quality of life for individuals. A key component

of being competent at work is experience. Offering guidance and gaining practical experience at the same time is beneficial because it can save time and money. Extensive study combined with practical, on-the-job training is a successful combination. People's experiences and decisions can shape who they are. To share ideas and competencies that result in growth or development in other people assistance is necessary. Therefore, by employing active learning techniques and utilising technologies for feedback and experience exchange, entrepreneurs can assist others in expanding their knowledge. Additionally, they should connect with individuals, corporate entities, the entire business, and customers outside the firm separately while acknowledging and respecting various interaction morals.

Understanding how people have failed to meet their criteria enables entrepreneurs to recognise how standards and values can evolve, in addition to their importance in the community. Therefore, interpersonal relationships are necessary for values to function. SMMEs must endeavour to safeguard their future and create a livable environment by fostering social interactions infused with integrity that can educate others about the importance of protecting their current surroundings. The study's potential was diminished when several participants refused to take part because they thought their information was private. As such, they were reluctant to take part. The study offers a foundation for comprehending that values, as a mediator between competencies and sustainable development, are essential to a nation's long-term economic growth. Hence, they are valid for answering our research question. This implies that entrepreneurs who make good value judgements contribute to a country's economic prosperity.

Future Recommendations

By encouraging individuals to explore the true sustainable development patterns that connect people with the company's mission and values, entrepreneurs may use realism to their advantage and realise most of their chances. Tracking successes and failures in the company's shared sustainable development projects could help entrepreneurs be more open when sharing ideas. People who value learning about sustainable development might benefit from the fair ideas that entrepreneurs convey. Entrepreneurs can also promote sustainable development by portraying it as a normal aspect of working life. Businesses can gain from demonstrating how sustainable development action is essential to their everyday operations and integral to the advancement of society, economic growth, and social progress. The core of accountability is consistency, which can be used in a variety of contexts, including the operation, implementation, or actions of individuals, organisations, products, processes, and information. For successful business development and results, the presentation must be consistent throughout all mentioned areas. In other words, each component of an organisation must be dependable for it to be effective. One of the most prevalent illnesses facing the globe today is poverty, which is defined as a lack of opportunities, knowledge, market accessibility, and supply, as well as income inequality and a lack of useful resources that people and communities need to get by.

Numerous factors might contribute to the issue of poverty. Poor education, restricted access to clean drinking water and nutritious food, climate change, and inequality are a few examples. SMMEs can help alleviate poverty via social accountability, skill development, job creation, and access to goods and services. Concerned over the decline in employment content is developing, and if nothing is done to enhance it, everyone will be in danger or suffer severe consequences. Social status can also be impacted by unemployment, and this might show up as psychological anguish, mood disorders, blaming, and incrimination. The necessity of long-term work is becoming increasingly recognised. To help people improve their professional skills, entrepreneurial businesses might use their excellent and creative ideas to teach them new things. According to the aforementioned, if the suggestions made above can be appropriately implemented in South Africa, entrepreneurs and their underlings can contribute significantly to their operations and sustainable development. From a policy perspective, frameworks must be tailored to the unique needs of communities to foster sustainable development effectively. Studies have shown that aligning policies with local expectations and stakeholder profiles significantly improves outcomes by ensuring that interventions are relevant and impactful (Mthuli et al., 2018).

To improve the findings' statistical power, future studies might think about utilising a bigger sample size. Other economic sectors would also need to be included in this sample. As stewards of service delivery, public organisations like municipalities may be included in that sample. Additionally, extra variables could be added while testing the model. Even though it has been

discovered that the scales used to assess values, entrepreneurial skills, and sustainable development are reasonably consistent, it would be beneficial to replicate the scales to increase their validity.

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