

Inhibiting Factors in the Adoption of Corporate Entrepreneurship at a State-Owned Agency in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Corporate Entrepreneurship (CE) has been used to develop new ideas and opportunities within established organisations, resulting in improved profitability, service delivery, and competitive advantages. This study explored the factors inhibiting CE adoption at the state agency in South Africa. It aims to expand on dimensions and provide practical interventions for creating a conducive environment for CE within a state-owned agency.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used a qualitative single-case study design. It employed semi-structured interviews with nine top management and Human Resources (HR) practitioners through Microsoft Teams. The study used inductive coding to analyse interview data using ATLAS.ti 23.

Findings: Challenges emerged as a theme for this study with four sub-themes: rewards, financial constraints, lack of knowledge of the CE process and low staff morale. The study revealed that these challenges inhibit the adoption of CE. In contrast, addressing these challenges can transform them into enabling factors that create a conducive environment for adopting CE. The study underscored the significance of optimising resource utilisation to promote CE, enhancing CE knowledge, and evaluating employee satisfaction.

Research limitations/implications: The study was limited to top management experts and HR practitioners, excluding other employees' participation.

Practical implications: Emphasises the need for practical interventions such as brainstorming, team coaching, credible e-learning platforms, and employee satisfaction surveys when implementing CE.

Originality/value: There are limited studies on the inhibitors of CE in South Africa's state-owned agencies.

Paper type: Research paper.

Keywords: Corporate Entrepreneurship, Rewards, Knowledge.

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I. INTRODUCTION

CE plays a crucial role in generating value by bringing new ideas and exploiting opportunities through innovation within an established organisation while assuming the risk of uncertainty. (Burke & Holmes, 2021). CE can occur in two forms: (i) corporate venturing, a way of entering new market arenas to revitalise or revise an organisation's portfolio, and (ii). strategic entrepreneurship, which entails collecting different entrepreneurial initiatives. This form includes strategic renewal, sustained regeneration, organisational rejuvenation and reconstruction of business models. (Zahra et al., 2013; Kuratko et al., 2011).

Researchers such as Kuratko et al. (2014); Mugunzva and Rankhumise (2020); Whipple and Peterson, (2009) have contributed insights into the dimensions that create an enabling environment for CE. These include top management support, work discretion/autonomy, rewards/ reinforcement, time availability, and organisational boundaries. The management role in CE is to create a work environment conducive to innovation and allow employees to be proactive and take risks (Kuratko et al., 2014). Kassa and Raju (2015) underscored the significance of the relationship between the organisation and its employees. These authors emphasised that

employees respond by exhibiting vigour, absorption and dedication to the organisation when they sense the working environment is conducive. Akbari et al. (2020); Özdemirci and Behram (2014) concurred that employees are more proactive and innovative and can contribute creative ideas for CE in a positive work environment.

Malatjie et al. (2017) highlighted that fostering entrepreneurial behaviour in the public sector can enhance service delivery, internal processes, turn-around time, reward systems, communication, and management-employee relationships. In South Africa, these benefits can also contribute to the government's goal of attaining the 11 million jobs target by 2030 (South Africa. National Planning Commission., 2012). The notion is that through CE, the organisation can practise entrepreneurial activities that involve innovative, proactive, risk-taking, strategic renewal and corporate venturing (Eze, 2018; Urbano et al., 2022), which in turn can contribute to the government reaching their goals. The pressure is even more significant for the South African state-owned agencies to contribute to attaining the National Development Plan goal as the government established state-owned agencies to guarantee continuous service to citizens (Department of Public Service and Administration & National Treasury, 2002).

However, high rigidity, red tape, and public scrutiny influenced by the media and opposition political parties regularly expose the sector's failures, conflict with entrepreneurial culture (Kuratko et al., 2011; Malatjie et al., 2017; Tocar, 2020). Therefore, more effort is required to create a climate conducive to CE in the public sector and state-owned agencies (Malatjie et al., 2017; Sithole, 2021; Sono, 2018). They recommended improving CE by implementing novel policies and training programmes, incorporating CE into organisational strategy, and encouraging innovation using suitable rewards and reinforcements. Additionally, Malatjie, Garg, and Rankhumise (2017) and Thabethe (2019) indicated that employees demonstrating entrepreneurial behaviour should be supported and rewarded.

Although previous research has highlighted the benefits of CE and recommended interventions to foster entrepreneurial behaviour in the organisation, as illustrated above, Chamba and Chazireni (2023) indicated that the state-owned agency continues to struggle to effectively respond to citizens' needs and deliver public value due to inadequate investment in intrapreneurial activities.

Thus, the research question posed by the study is: Given the importance of CE and interventions to foster entrepreneurial behaviour as recommended by previous studies, what factors are inhibiting the adoption of CE at a state-owned agency?

An in-depth investigation of the inhibitors in CE adoption, specifically in state-owned agencies in South Africa, remains limited. This study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the factors that inhibit the adoption of CE at a state-owned agency in South Africa.

The value of this study lies in its in-depth investigation of CE by analysing the dimensions identified as contributing variables by previous researchers and engaging top management experts and HR practitioners through a qualitative approach. The study aims to expand on dimensions and provide practical interventions for creating a conducive environment for CE within a state-owned agency. It is envisaged that by identifying the issues inhibiting the adoption of CE, state-owned agencies will be better able to adopt and promote CE.

A. Corporate entrepreneurship in the state agencies in South Africa

Although CE is broadly used globally (Banumathi, 2020), the term commonly used in South Africa, particularly in state agencies, is an innovation compared to CE. Baloyi (2017) reasons that South Africa needs to be competitive in the global market to improve its economy, and innovation is mainly recommended. In addition, innovation is one of the organisational values in state agencies such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency, the Technology Innovation Agency, the Media Development and Diversity Agency, and the Small Enterprise Finance Agency. Likewise, the North West Development Corporation (NWDC) does not use the term CE. The phrase innovation is frequently used at NWDC. It also represents one of their strategic values, supporting the development of concepts or inventions into products or services that add value for clients (South Africa. North West Development Corporation, 2022). The NWDC prioritises innovation and a development plan that is driven by innovation and focused on competitive advantage (South Africa. North West Development Corporation, 2022)).

The study of van Vuuren (2016) provided profound insight into CE in South Africa's state agency i.e. South African Revenue Service by revealing significant presence of entrepreneurship. Although the term CE is not used at this state agency, there is evidence of innovative and proactive elements being practised. The innovative and proactive elements are embedded in aspects such as the modernisation programme, where the agency enhances the experience of the dealer and taxpayer while introducing innovative business practices. Additionally, there is proof that this agency ventured when Interfront was established as a wholly-owned subsidiary. van Vuuren (2016) illustrated that its strategy development includes innovative and proactive practices critical for the agency to achieve its goals. The top management understands that entrepreneurship is essential to the organisation's current and future growth. (van Vuuren, 2016).

Molefi and Hoque (2021) asserted that state agencies should carry out the necessary interventions to foster an entrepreneurial mindset in employees. The entrepreneurial vision must be transparent and communicated in the organisation. Management support must be prioritised, and a reward system must be introduced (Molefi & Hoque, 2021)). Against this background, the study assesses the inhibiting factors towards the adoption of CE within the context of state-owned agencies in South Africa.

II. METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative single case study design. This design was selected as it facilitates thorough research and understanding of the intricate issues being addressed (Makri & Neely, 2021; Pillai & Kaushal, 2020), which is an understanding of the inhibiting factors in adopting CE at a state-owned agency. The research was conducted using an exploratory research design to gain new insights (Makri & Neely 2021:2; Pillai & Kaushal 2020:3). This study utilised expert guidelines (rule of thumb) to determine the sample size for in-depth individual interviews (Makri & Neely, 2021; Pillai & Kaushal, 2020). The study used the recommendation of Parse (1990), cited by Sim et al. (2018) that 2–10 participants are sufficient to achieve saturation. This study involved a total of nine top management experts and HR practitioners as a purposive sample. Top management was selected by choosing the top two levels of the organisational structure accountable for critical decision-making (Fox et al., 2022). HR practitioners were selected as they significantly foster core skills to gain long-term competitive advantage through people (Kuratko et al., 2011).

Before data collection, the study developed a semi-structured interview guide based on a literature review. Open-ended questions were used and questions were sequenced to avoid confusion. The pre-test interview was conducted before the interview with two peers familiar with the research topic, as advised by (McGrath et al., 2019). The interview guide was submitted to the university's faculty committee for research ethics approval. The committee made comments, and subsequent modifications were made.

The study collected data through in-depth virtual interviews using Microsoft Teams (Creswell, 2014; Patel & Patel, 2019). Despite the potential disadvantages of virtual interviews, such as microphones and background noise (Carter et al., 2021; Keen et al., 2022). Virtual interviewing has improved voice capture, transcription, and screen-sharing capabilities (Keen et al., 2022). Microsoft Teams was used for this study because of its quality, user friendliness and functionalities (Almodaires et al., 2021). Based on the list of eligible participants from the state agency, the researcher achieved a 75% response rate, as illustrated in Figure 1.

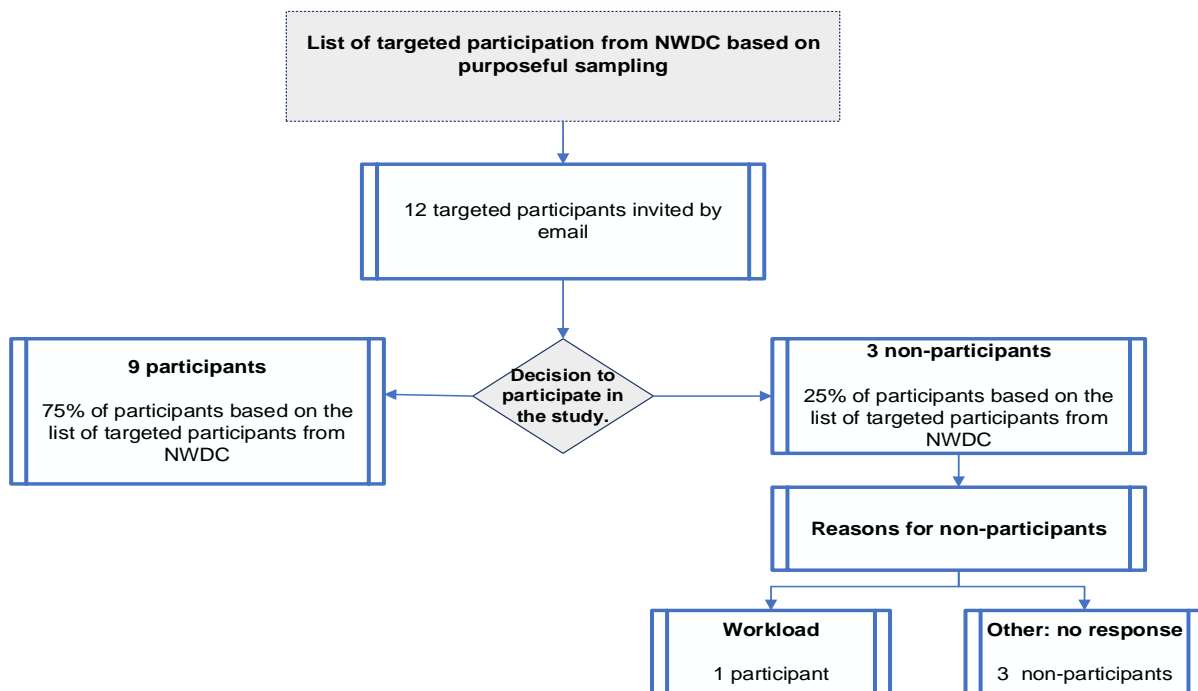


Figure 1 – : Response rate

The study analysed interview data using ATLAS.ti 23. Interview transcripts were imported into ATLAS.ti 23 to discover themes. The researchers employed an inductive coding approach, allowing themes to arise from

participant discussions. The researcher coded as many potential themes/patterns and organised codes into prospective themes before assembling pertinent data extracts inside the determined themes as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher thoroughly reviewed the data to confirm the validity of themes and incorporate new information (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gauthier & Wallace, 2022). Conclusions were drawn based on the evidence of the themes (Thornton et al., 2020).

Valid qualitative research requires evidence and trustworthiness, which are essential quality assurance criteria. This study used prolonged engagement, member checks, and bias techniques to achieve trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014). The permission to conduct the study was sought and obtained from the NWDC. Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from the university's faculty committee for research ethics. Afterwards, the researcher requested that participants complete an informed consent form. An information leaflet providing all the necessary details concerning the research, including confidentiality and participants' rights, was provided to participants before the interview.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Description of a case

The NWDC based in South Africa was selected as a case for this study as it is a state agency that underwent internal evolutions over the years, including mergers, retrenchments and being placed under judicial management (South Africa. North West Development Corporation, 2023). The NWDC, a Schedule 3D provincial government entity, is responsible for planning, financing, coordinating, and promoting economic development in the North West Province. It focuses on industries, commerce, finance, mining, tourism, and other businesses to create wealth and jobs (South Africa. North West Development Corporation, 2023).

B. Presentation of findings

This study sought to achieve the research objective "To assess the inhibiting factors in adopting CE at the state agency in South Africa." This section presents findings from interviews with top management and HR practitioners, highlighting the main theme and sub-themes, summarised in Table 1. Figure 1 illustrates the findings.

Table 1 – Themes and Sub-themes

<i>Broad themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Rewards</i>
	<i>Financial constraints</i>
	<i>Lack of knowledge of the CE process</i>
	<i>Low staff morale</i>

C. Theme: challenges

In the context of this study, challenges refer to the factors that are inhibiting the adoption of CE. The participants advocate that addressing these challenges can transform them into enabling factors.

D. Sub-theme: rewards

In this study, rewards refer to employee benefits for entrepreneurial behaviour, categorised as monetary or non-monetary. The study found that participants associate rewards with financial rewards, indicating that the organisation typically does not offer monetary incentives to encourage entrepreneurial behaviour, inhibiting CE adoption. The participants believed financial rewards could enable CE adoption at the state agency. This was encapsulated in the following quotations:

"There are no financial or non-financial rewards for people who show entrepreneurial behaviour" (P1).

"No. there are no financial or non-financial rewards. You have done your work. No other compensation involved" (P2).

"Where the organisation is highly lacking is appropriate remuneration packages that are aligned to the current economic status and horizontal pay brackets in line with similar entities and employee wellness programmes, which in turn will ensure that employees are encouraged to practice corporate entrepreneurship" (P6).

"So we are not really having a competitive system. A reward system that can really encourage staff generally. So I would say that it's a challenge and that is brought about by the budget" (P7).

This finding demonstrates clear perceptions among the participants that the absence of rewards inhibits the adoption of CE at the state agency. In contrast, the presence of rewards can enable the adoption of CE. Furthermore, the participants perceive rewards as financial, such as performance bonuses. (Kumar et al., 2018) stated that besides financial rewards, employees are encouraged by non-financial rewards such as work independence, career advancement opportunities, a good working environment and an excellent supervisor-subordinate relationship. Moodley (2011) pointed out that not all employees prefer non-monetary rewards. Despite employee preference, the study emphasises the importance of employee rewards in enabling entrepreneurial behaviour.

E. Sub-theme: financial constraints

Financial constraints are the second sub-theme under challenges. From the perspective of this study, financial constraints refer to a constraint limiting the adoption of CE at the state agency. In contrast, the availability of funds could contribute to promoting CE. The NWDC, a state agency providing services such as property leasing, development, loans, and bridging finances for Small, Medium-sized and Micro Enterprises, has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as tenants struggle to pay rent on time, affecting their cash flow and compounding the former severe financial constraints. The participants highlighted financial constraints as a critical issue faced by NWDC. For example, the participants stated that:

"But now the challenge is that the organisation's finances are not stable" (P1).

"... no financial rewards available. It becomes very difficult even to encourage staff in anything" (P3).

"So I would say that it's a challenge and that is brought about by the budget" (P9).

"Its facing so many challenges such as financial constraints and cash flow challenges" (P8).

"Where the organisation is highly lacking is appropriate remuneration packages that are aligned to the current economic status and horizontal pay brackets in line with similar entities" (P5).

The findings underscore financial constraints as one of the most critical challenges encountered by the NWDC. This resonates with Wang et al. (2022), who highlighted financial constraints as one of the significant obstacles to organisations in emerging economies. A similar result was found by Sono (2018), which states that only a few intrapreneurial initiatives from public servants and platforms are supported due to inadequate funding. As such, the organisation needs to see financial constraints as an opportunity for CE by saving resources for CE interventions and encouraging employee ideation towards more practical uses of the available resources, as advised by Acar et al. (2019). These authors believe that when there is overall support for creativity and innovation within an organisation, employees may view financial constraints positively, motivating them to be more creative under a stricter budget.

F. Sub-theme: lack of knowledge of the CE process

The lack of knowledge of the CE process is the third sub-theme. The findings highlight the lack of knowledge about the CE process, which involves understanding opportunities, developing ideas, acquiring resources, and managing ventures. The participants primarily used innovation, which might be because innovation is also one of their strategic values. However, they were unaware of entrepreneurial concepts and CE processes, citing lack of knowledge as a hindering factor in adopting CE. Conversely, if employees understand CE they could be encouraged in adopting CE. It was expressed by the participants as follows:

"I don't think employees are aware that they can be innovative and proactive in their work" (P2).

"Ensure that HR officials are trained in corporate entrepreneurship and the role of HRM in developing and sustaining that culture" (P4).

"The way things are currently, one can hardly indicate which practices are stimulating this corporate entrepreneurship concept" (P6).

"Personally of course it is a very interesting concept that I think I'm a little bit aware of" (P7).

This finding highlights the importance of education and awareness regarding CE at a state agency. . Not knowing the implementation process could undermine employees' ability to be entrepreneurial. Management should implement programs to enhance employees' knowledge about CE.

G. Sub-theme: low staff morale

The fourth sub-theme discusses low staff morale, illustrated in Figure 1. In this study, low staff morale refers to employees feeling unmotivated to adopt entrepreneurial behaviour. In contrast, employees with high staff morale and motivation can enable the adoption of CE. The participants identified factors such as unstable top

management, management style, and employee recognition negatively impacting staff morale. The participants explained that the top management has a high turnover in the top two layers of the organisational structure. The top management often changes before employees build a good working relationship and learn their preferred working and management style.

Consequently, it leads to unmotivated employees being disinterested in entrepreneurial activities. The ideal situation is low turnover, where top management encourages and recognises employees' contributions. The participants identify low staff morale as another factor inhibiting the adoption of CE.

"Employees are negative and unhappy and feel that their work is not appreciated".

"Our executive managers are not lasting. It does affect how employees carry out their tasks. It it really does" (P1).

"A change in management style is needed" (P2).

These findings align with the National Development Plan, which states that low staff morale has also been identified as one of the hindrances in achieving South Africa's need to build a state capable of playing a developmental and transformative role (South Africa. National Planning Commission, 2012). Thus, demotivated employees are more likely to fail in implementing CE. Therefore, they must work in environments that promote information and knowledge sharing (Molefi & Hoque, 2021).

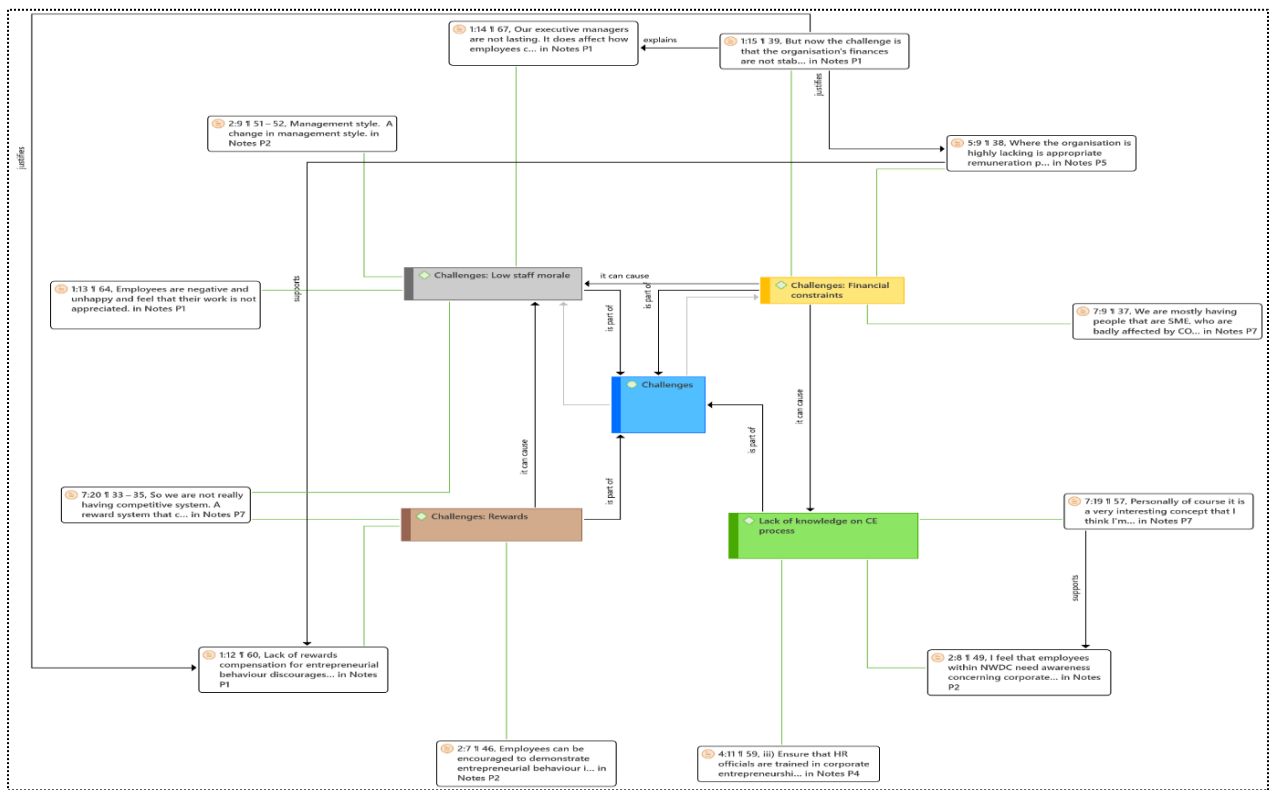


Figure 2 – : Findings for the theme: challenges

Source: researcher's own construct [using ATLAS.ti network function on findings].

IV. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that organisational challenges, such as lack of rewards, financial constraints, lack of knowledge of the CE process, and low staff morale, hinder the adoption of CE. The study recommends brainstorming, focusing on non-monetary rewards, and implementing team coaching interventions. Additionally, the study recommends introducing credible e-learning platforms and online resources focusing on CE programs, using the training-the-trainer approach, and conducting an employee satisfaction survey to assess employee engagement and identify challenges. Implementing these recommendations can foster entrepreneurial behaviour in organisations.

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