

**MODERATING ROLE OF DECISION MAKING ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MANAGERS' COMPREHENSION
OF EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF
SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN KINSHASA,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The main aim of the study was to assess the Moderating Role of Decision Making on the Relationship between Managers' Comprehension of External Environment and Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Statement of the Problem: Strategy is concerned with the relationship between an organisation and its environment hence the need for managers to be aware of the environment in which they operate. However, empirical literature on the extent to which managers comprehend the external environment facing their organisations, how this relates with performance and how decision making affects this relationship is scarce.

Research Methodology: By adopting a positivist paradigm a descriptive survey cross-sectional of 520 SMEs managers in Kinshasa was conducted to ascertain the moderating role of decision making on the relationship between managers' comprehension of external environment (political, economic, socio-cultural, legal and technological factors) and performance of SMEs. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire. The data was coded and analyzed with the SPSS version 23 program.

Results: It was found that intuitive decisions were being made more than rational ones by the SME managers and that intuitive decision making was more strongly related with performance than rational decision making was. Further, as a moderator, intuitive decision making increased the strength of the relationship between comprehension of external environment and performance.

Conclusion: The study concluded that decision making moderates the relationship between manager's comprehension of external environment and performance of SMEs in Kinshasa.

Recommendation: It was recommended that, management should always ensure them assess all the factors that are likely to affect their business before making decision and once decision is made it should be communicated to all the employees.

Key words: *Intuitive, Rational, Decision making, External environment, Performance.*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Strategy is concerned with the relationship between an organisation and its environment hence the need for managers to be aware of the environment in which they operate. The relationship between the environment and performance of organisations has received considerable attention in literature. However, empirical literature on managers' cognition with regard to external environment is scarce. Further, the manner in which managers make decision depending on their understanding of the external environment is less researched. Decision-making is a crucial part of contemporary management. Whatever a manager does he does by choosing. Decision-making permeates via all supervisory features particularly planning, organizing, leadership, and control. The rate of interest in tactical decision-making has actually grown in the field of critical monitoring and has come to be a considerable chauffeur in gaining successful tactical change (Patel, Pieper & Hair, 2016). Additionally, critical decision-making processes are given substantial interest. On top of that, the decision-making process may be watched simply as deciding. More comprehensively, decision-making is a systematic process that starts with determining a need or problem and also ends with application of the picked choice. Zhao and Zhang (2019) specifies that choice making penetrates all functions of management, specifically where top administration is confronted daily with picking the strategy that will certainly finest accomplish the goals to which the business is dedicated. He even more mentions that decision-making is the most crucial activity of monitoring. Business decision-making is quite complicated and happens within restrictions that include emotional, environmental and decision-related aspects.

It is observed that firms operate in environment that seems to be uncertain. However, Small and Medium Enterprises have proven to have positive effect in the development of economies in all countries around the world. Nevertheless, the level of intended performance has remained disappointing. This has led to some failure as it has also been observed in empirical literature. SMEs have tremendous role for the development of the economy in general around all the nations in the world and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in particular (Camuffo, Cordova, Gambardella & Spina, 2019). The desire of every woman and every man of age is to start her or his own business as stated by Hong (2018) that in United States of America 8.0 million minority-owned businesses and the number of owners grew to 2.3% in 2016. In Kenya a survey done by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics announced that 400,000 created did not reach their second year of operation, few of them struggle to reach their five years birthday (Kenya SME Finance Survey, 2018).

According to the World Bank report (2017) over 9 out of 10 firms did not reach five years and these firms contribute to the reduction of unemployment at around 60 %. The Republic democratic of the Congo is one of the countries in Africa that can offer great opportunities for business because of the population evaluated at more than 80 million and it has various resources. Particularly Kinshasa is a city of more than 10 million inhabitants. In DR Congo there

is possibility of diversification of its economy. However, the politicians are only focused on the minerals whereas; the small and medium enterprises as stated earlier can contribute strongly dynamically in the creation of the new jobs. Though the rate of unemployment is about 70% in Kinshasa, the contribution of Small enterprises to the annual employment growth rate is 5, 2 percent, and 6% of the medium enterprises whereby the large firms' contribution is of 1.3%.

The second theory is the institutional view which focuses on how a firm can make it possible to reach a stable and durable state (Shibin *et al*, 2017). This paper is using institutional view to demonstrate the importance of managers as the first actors to move the SMEs in Kinshasa to reach the sustainable competitive advantage that will enable the stability and longevity in the market. This can only be possible if managers demonstrate their ability to comprehend their environment and propose solutions that lead to efficient decision making.

The third theory in this study employed is the Dynamic capabilities view especially adapted to the environment where the situations are unpredictable and uncertain in general (Takahashi, Bulgacov, Bitencourt & Kaynak, 2017). The use of the dynamic capabilities view in this study is used because the business market in Kinshasa is done in uncertainty and unpredictable environment due to the political unrest. This situation requires managers that are dynamic in their course of actions.

The study ascertained the moderating role of decision making on the relationship between manager's comprehension of external environment and performance of SMEs in Kinshasa. Among all the external environment factors, Political factors are the most that cause a lot of disturbance in business market. Political factors affect almost all the other environmental factors and even the performance. This is because political factors depend on the government leadership regulations affecting the economic, the socio-cultural, technological and legal factors which also contribute in affecting the performance. In addition, all these factors require managers' skills to comprehend them in order to adapt their decision according to their changes (Barile & Saviano, 2018). Though the political factors seem to be the main environment factors of disturbance to the business market all other environmental factors that cannot be controlled by the firms occupy a key place to be observed and comprehended to protect the firms from their effect on the performance. The economic can affect the performance when there is change in interest rate of inflation, change on the currency exchange rate (Barakat, Elgazzar & Hanafy, 2016). The change in socio-cultural such as change in mores and values may affect the industry. These changes may open the door of opportunities or the door of threats that need to be comprehended by managers to capture the opportunities and to counter the threats. The Technological factors are known to be the most that vary rapidly and involve the skill of creativity, innovation and adaptation from managers to at page in order to survive in the business market.

Efficiency is a contextual principle related to the phenomenon being studied (Carton & Hofer, 2016). In a setting with continual modification, efficiency measurement of firms as well as companies is substantial. The attention of efficiency dimension need to exceed the standard financing assessment, which determines sales growth, earnings, and return on investments as well as capital to making use of balanced scorecard. This includes monetary performance, consumer fulfillment, staff member training and also knowing, and also technology (Barakat et al., 2016). Organizational efficiency is the organization's general efficiency in meeting the determined needs of each of its component teams (also referred to as stakeholders) through organized efforts that continuously enhance its ability to address those requirements efficiently (Griffis, Goldsby, Cooper & Closs, 2017). Moreover, an additional essential strategy-evaluation

activity is gauging organizational efficiency. This activity consists of contrasting expected results to real results, checking out inconsistencies from plans, evaluating individual efficiency, and analyzing progress being made towards meeting mentioned purposes (David & David, 2017). Additionally, company performance is determined primarily by two elements: sector and also strong impacts. Sector impacts describe the underlying financial framework of the industry. They associate solid performance to the market in which the company completes (Hallak, Assaker, O'Connor & Lee, 2018). Examination and control requires monitoring the organization's efficiency to ensure that the picked technique achieves the wanted goals. The corporation assesses as well as appraises its mission, objectives, objectives, methods, and also policies because of its vibrant as well as ever-changing setting.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

Through a positivist paradigm a census targeting of all 643 SMEs from various industries and sectors in Kinshasa, DR Congo was conducted where primary data was obtained from managers using structured questionnaires with measured anchored on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). The drop-and – pick- later approach was employed to deliver the questions to the respondents and collect them later.

The instrument was pretested on 10 SMEs. This pretest was to check on the accuracy of the statement in describing the variables in the study and the clarity in the statements. The researcher received comment and suggestions on the length of the questionnaire. These inputs were used to refine the instrument before distribution for the actual data collection. Further, in order to ensure internal validity, the attached questionnaire was prepared based on in-depth review of literature on the study variables and identification of the items that had been previously used to measure these variables. A threshold of 0.7 of Cronbach alpha was achieved and deemed acceptable as recommended for studies similar to this study. Throughout the study, we abided with the ethical requirements by maintaining confidentiality of all respondents and necessary authorizations from the ministry of SMEs in DRC. In order to determine decision making approaches and level of performance descriptive analyses were used the relationship between the comprehension of external environment and the performance; and the moderating role of decision making on this relationship was assessed using inferential analyses comprising correlation and regression analyses on the data that was collected. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire. The data was coded and analysed with the SPSS version 23 program; the results presented in the tables.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Out of 643 questionnaires that were distributed to managers of SMEs, 520 questionnaires were returned representing 81% of response rate. Based on the questionnaire data, the results of the analysis are in two categories: descriptive and inferential results. While the descriptive results are for the extent of decision making practices and performance as measured by statements on financial, internal process improvements and customer satisfaction.

Decision Making Style

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on the manner in which decision were being made in their organisations. The statements were on characteristics of both rational (RDM) and

intuitive (IDM) decision making with two statements on each of the decision types; the results are presented on Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Decision- Making

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD
Rational Decision Making							
We make decisions upon analyzing all available information	3.80	5.40	6.90	47.10	36.70	4.08	1.00
We compare all available alternative options before making a decision	6.20	7.50	6.90	47.10	32.30	3.92	1.11
Average						4.00	1.06
Intuitive Decision Making							
We base our decision on what has been found to work in the past	7.50	6.70	10.00	42.10	33.70	3.88	1.17
Most of our decisions are based on consensus	4.40	7.90	5.60	51.90	30.20	3.96	1.04
Average						3.92	1.11

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the respondents agreed that they were making decisions upon analyzing all available information (M = 4.08, SD = 1.00) showing that most respondents agreed with the statement however the responses were varied about the mean. The respondents were asked to indicate if they compared all available alternative options before making a decision and majority of them agreed as shown by a mean of 3.92 and standard deviation of 1.11.

The overall mean for rational decision was 4.00 and that respondents were in agreement with both statements under rational decision making, but the responses were widely varied (SD = 1.06). Further, the respondents were asked to indicate their view concerning the result of intuitive choice. Most of the respondents agreed that they based their choice on what had actually been found to work in the past (M = 3.88, SD = SD = 1.17). The responses were however, widely varied as shown by a standard deviation greater than unity (SD > 1.00).

On whether most of their decisions were based on consensus the majority of them agreed that most of their decisions were based on consensus (M = 3.96, SD = 1.04). The average mean for the statements on intuitive decision making statements was 3.92 showing that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statements but the reactions differed extensively (SD = 1.11). These outcomes concur with the findings by Gond (2016) which suggested that decision-making research study has a main location in economics, psychology, and company concept. The prediction of the ideal choice for the provided individual is based upon the idea that individuals wish to make sensible decision thinking about all possible options, making use of available information carefully, although subjective, weighting of the potential costs and also advantages is also done.

Performance

In order to assess the level of performance of SMEs self-reports were sought from the SME managers. The statements on performance were aligned with there of the perspectives of the balanced score card framework where there was a statement on financial, customer, and internal processes.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Performance

Statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	SD
Returns on our assets have improved in the last two years	2.70	3.50	2.90	63.10	27.90	4.10	0.82
Margin of our profit have improved over the last two years	1.50	0.40	1.50	25.20	71.30	4.64	0.68
We have improved our business processes significantly over the last two years	1.50	2.10	1.50	82.50	12.30	4.02	0.60
We have increased our sales over the last two years	0.80	0.60	1.00	77.50	20.20	4.16	0.53
The satisfaction of our customers has improved in the last two years	2.10	1.70	2.70	56.90	36.50	4.24	0.77
We regularly achieve objectives of our business.	1.50	1.20	0.40	70.70	26.20	4.19	0.64
Average						4.23	0.67

According to the results on Table 2, most of the respondents agreed that their assets had increased over the previous two years (M = 4.10) revealing that the majority of the respondents agreed with the declaration nevertheless the responses were slightly varied as indicated by a standard deviation of 0.82 which was close to 1. Concerning increase in earnings, most of the respondents agreed that their profit had increased over the previous 2 years (M = 4.64, SD = 0.68). Regarding whether they had enhanced their organisation procedures considerably over the previous 2 years as well as the majority of them agreed (M = 4.02, SD = 0.60). The results were that majority of the respondents reported that they had increased their sales over the previous two years (M = 4.16, SD = 0.53).

We asked the respondents to indicate whether the satisfaction of their clients had improved over the previous two years and as the majority of them agreed that the satisfaction of their customers had improved over the previous two years (M = 4.24, SD = 0.77). Further, respondents agreed that they achieved the goals in their company on a regular basis (M = 4.19, SD = 0.64). The composite mean and also standard deviation for statements under efficiency were 4.23 and 0.67. This implies that the respondents agreed with the majority of the statements concerning the efficiency of their services.

Relationship between, external environment comprehension, decision making and performance

The strength of the relationship between the comprehension of five external environment variables (name them), the decision making (intuitive and rational) and performance. The following (Table 3) are the correlation analysis results between pairs of study variables.

Table 3: Relationship between comprehension of external environment, decision making and performance of SMEs

Variable/ Construct	POF	ECF	SCF	TEF	LEF	RDM	IDM	SO	SE	SI	PEQ	10*R OA	Log (Prof it)	Log (Sale s)
Performance (Qualitative) (PEQ)	.089*	0.02	0.035	0.044	0.05	0.013	0.072^	.089*	-0.036	-0.055	1			
	0.043	0.645	0.426	0.32	0.251	0.763	0.1	0.043	0.417	0.211				
12 10*ROA	.125**	0.007	-0.042	-0.038	-0.025	0.065	-0.018	0.022	-0.073^	-0.066	-0.062	1		
	0.004	0.881	0.342	0.392	0.562	0.139	0.684	0.617	0.095	0.131	0.161			
13 log_Profit	0.019	-0.023	-0.03	0.003	0.045	0.075^	-0.019	0.002	-0.047	-0.045	-0.017	0.009	1	
	0.658	0.601	0.501	0.94	0.309	0.087	0.667	0.955	0.282	0.301	0.698	0.839		
14 log_Sales	-0.06	0.014	0.05	-0.038	-0.075	-0.036	0.048	0.042	-0.044	-0.034	-0.032	0.03	0.022	1
	0.172	0.75	0.256	0.385	0.086	0.406	0.275	0.344	0.311	0.441	0.472	0.499	0.613	
	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520	520

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ^ Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level (2-tailed)

As seen from Table 3, rational decision making (RDM) had a slight positive relationship with sales ($r= 0.075$, $p < 0.1$), the relationship between intuitive decision making (IDM) and qualitative assessment of performance was weak and negative ($r= -0.072$, $p = 0.1$). Further, the more the managers applied RDM approach the higher would be the profitability of their SMEs. Similarly, the more IDM was applied, the more/positively will the managers be inclined to qualitatively assess their performance as satisfactory.

Moderating Effect of Decision making on the relationship between Manager’s Comprehension of External Environment and Performance

In order to determine the moderating effect of decision making on comprehension of external environment – Qualitative performance relationship, only Intuitive Decision Making was used because it was significantly predicted by the Comprehension of External Environment. Since there was no significant relationship between comprehension external environment (sumENV/CEE) and rational decision making (RDM), the latter was not used as a moderator.

The moderating effect of DM on the CEE – Performance relationship was assessed in three steps test : Step 1 – Direct effect of CEE on Performance, Step 2 – combined effect of CEE and DM on performance and Step 3 – The introduction of the inter action term (DM*CEE).

Step 1: Influence of DM (IDM) on performance (PEQ)

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.087	1	18.087	6.430	.012 ^b
	Residual	1456.983	518	2.813		
	Total	1475.069	519			

a. Dependent Variable: sum PEQ

b. Predictors: (Constant), sum ENV (CEE)

From the results in Table 4, and Table 5 the model linking environmental factors (CEE) and performance (PEQ) was statistically significant. Further, the results imply that decision-making was a good predictor of Manager’s Comprehension of External Environment and Performance.

Table 5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	21.631	1.465		14.762	.000
	Sum ENV	.166	.066	.111	2.536	.012

a. Dependent Variable: sum PEQ

Step 2: Introducing the moderator – Intuitive decision making

The regression results upon introduction of DM (intuitive decision making) are presented in Tables 6 to 8

Table 6: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.136 ^a	.019	.015	1.673

a. Predictors: (Constant), sum IDM, sum ENV

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.289	2	13.645	4.872	.008 ^b
	Residual	1447.780	517	2.800		
	Total	1475.069	519			

a. Dependent Variable: sum PEQ

b. Predictors: (Constant), sum IDM, sum ENV

The result in Table 7 indicates that the model was statistically significant. This implied that the intuitive decision-making predicted performance. This finding is supported a calculated F (2,517) of 4.872 which was greater than the critical F(2,517) of 2.9957 and the reported p-value of 0.008 which was less than the conventional probability significance level of 0.05. This implied that the intuition decision-making (IDM) was a statistically significant predictor of quantitative performance. Further, the regression of coefficient result showed that the t-value of 2.536 was greater than 1.96. This suggested that managers of SMEs in Kinshasa be more intuitive in their business decision business.

Table 8: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	20.815	1.530		13.606	.000
	Sum CEE	.172	.065	.114	2.620	.009
	Sum IDM	.089	.049	.079	1.813	.070

a. Dependent Variable: sum PEQ

The moderator (IDM) was significant at $p < 0.1$ in explaining performance of SMEs

Step 3: Introducing the interaction variable sum CEE*sum Intuitive Decision Making

The regression results with the introduction of the interaction term were presented in Table 8, Table 10 and Table 11.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.156 ^a	.024	.019	1.678

a. Predictors: (Constant), ENV*IDM, sum ENV, sum IDM

Table 10: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.935	3	11.645	4.134	.007 ^b
	Residual	1394.504	495	2.817		
	Total	1429.439	498			

a. Dependent Variable: sum PEQ

b. Predictors: (Constant), sumENV*IDM, sum ENV, sum IDM

Table 11: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	21.279	8.529		2.495	.013
	Sum ENV	.149	.382	.096	.389	.697
	Sum IDM	-.075	1.061	-.067	-.071	.944
	ENV*IDM	.008	.048	.154	.160	.873

a. Dependent Variable: sum PEQ

The interaction variable does not have a significant coefficient (B = 0.008, t = 0.160, p = 0.873)

Model 1: $R^2 = 0.012$, $F_{(3,495)} = 6.430$ greater than $F_{\infty} = 2.649$ p = 0.012 less than 0.05 without moderator.

Model 2: $R^2 = 0.019$, $F_{(42,517)} = 4.872$ greater than $F_{\infty} = 2.9957$, p = 0.008 less than 0.05 with moderator.

Model 3: $R^2 = 0.024$, $F_{(3,495)} = 4.134$ greater than $F_{\infty} = 2.6049$, p = 0.007 less than 0.05 with moderator and interaction term.

The moderating effect was positive because it resulted in the increase in the value of R^2 and of the model fit because the p-value decreased with the introduction of the moderator (from p = 0.012 to p = 0.008), and from p = 0.008 to p = 0.007 when the interaction term was added. The moderating effect was weak but positive. It can be concluded that the more intuitive decision was

made, the stronger was the relationship between comprehension of the CEE and performance; however it is also evident that the introduction of the interaction term results in the influence of CEE on PEQ becoming insignificant. In this regard, it is concluded that intuitive decision making weakens the relationship between comprehension of the external environment and performance.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the research findings it is concluded that decision making has a moderating effect on the relationship between manager's' comprehension of external environment and performance of SMEs in Kinshasa. Based on the regression results, it is concluded that Manager's Comprehension of External Environment positively and also significantly influence decision making approach in the SMEs in Kinshasa, DR Congo. The prediction of the optimal decision for the given individual is based on the belief that people want to make rational decision taking into account all known options, using maximal quantity of available information careful, although subjective, weighting of the potential costs and benefits.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The management of SMEs should always ensure they asses all the external factors (political, economic, cultural, legal and technological) that are likely to affect their business before making decision and once decision is made it should be communicated to all the employees; and that the decision made should be based on consensus. It is also recommended that managers of SMEs in Kinshasa should enhance their intuitive decision-making skills in order to more accurately apply their comprehensions the external environment forces as a basis for improving their performance. SMEs in Kinshasa in particular and in DR Congo in general are required to have contingency plans that will allow them to face any external environment forces effectively. Finally, it is recommended that, managers should enhance their understanding of the environments to be able to adapt their decision-making to ever rapidly changing environments. Further, the management should ensure their employees are aware of all government policies that govern their business, they should be well conversant with all taxes laws and tariffs relevant to their type of business so as to avoid being at cross road with the laws regulating SMEs. They should also ensure cultural norms of the community in which they conduct business are understood well so that they may positively respond to culture and norms of their clients with appropriate products and services to improve the performance of their enterprises.

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