

## An examination of implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs: The case of Lusaka District, Zambia

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Lusaka District, Zambia. The research aims to assess the awareness of strategic planning practices, examine how these SMEs implement strategic planning, and identify the challenges that hinder effective implementation. This study was guided by the resource-based view theory and the contingency theory. The study integrated the Resource-Based View (RBV) and contingency theory to provide a holistic explanation of strategic planning implementation among manufacturing SMEs. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised 195 manufacturing SMEs registered with the Zambia Association of Manufacturers (ZAM). Using the Yamane formula, a sample of 131 SMEs was determined, and structured questionnaires were administered, yielding 73 usable responses, resulting in a response rate of 55.7 per cent. Qualitative data were gathered through open-ended survey items and analysed thematically, while quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics via SPSS. The findings reveal a notable gap between the perceived importance of strategic planning and its actual implementation. Although 88 per cent of respondents rated their awareness of strategic planning as high or very high, 56 per cent reported operating without formalised planning processes. Among those that engage in planning, 62 per cent do not revisit their strategic plans regularly. The most commonly utilised strategic planning tool was SWOT analysis, employed by 88.3 per cent of respondents, while more advanced tools, such as scenario planning, were rarely used. Key challenges identified included short-term operational pressures, lack of skills or expertise, limited institutional support, and inadequate financial resources, all perceived as significant barriers to effective strategic planning. The study concludes that strategic planning practices among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka are largely informal and underdeveloped. To enhance competitiveness and sustainability, the research recommends targeted capacity-building programmes, the development of simplified planning toolkits, the strengthening of institutional and policy frameworks, and improved collaboration between SMEs, government agencies, and support organisations. Future research should focus on expanding the study to other provinces and investigating the role of digital tools in strategic planning among Zambian SMEs.

**Keywords:** Implementation, Lusaka District, Organizational Capability, Manufacturing SMEs, Strategic Planning, Zambia

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, strategic planning has been widely recognized as a key driver of organizational performance and sustainability. However, its adoption among SMEs has evolved differently compared to large organizations, largely due to differences in resource availability, managerial capacity, and organizational structure (Abosedo et al., 2016). Evidence from developed economies indicates relatively high levels of adoption, with approximately 65–75% of SMEs in the United States engaging in some form of strategic planning, while about 60–70% of SMEs in Europe have formal strategic plans (Chivwindi et al., 2023). These figures suggest that strategic planning is increasingly viewed as an essential management tool for enhancing competitiveness and long-term viability. In contrast, developing regions—particularly in Africa—exhibit lower levels of adoption of formal strategic planning practices. For instance, studies indicate that only about 35–45% of SMEs in Kenya engage in strategic planning, while approximately 50% of SMEs in South Africa have formal strategic plans. These comparatively lower levels of adoption are often attributed to factors such as limited managerial expertise, inadequate resources, and weak institutional support systems. Consequently, many SMEs in these regions rely on informal or intuitive decision-making processes, which may hinder long-term growth and sustainability (Mulenga, 2023).

In Zambia, the situation is even more pronounced, as a significant proportion of SMEs operate informally and lack structured strategic planning processes (Financial Sector Deepening Zambia). This lack of formal planning frameworks limits their ability to effectively respond to market dynamics and sustain growth. SMEs, however, play a critical role in the Zambian economy by contributing to employment creation, income generation, and economic

diversification. Despite their importance, many SMEs struggle with sustainability and growth challenges, raising concerns about their long-term viability.

Empirical evidence highlights the severity of this challenge. A study by Chivwindi et al. (2023), which examined SMEs in Lusaka Central and Mwembeshi business areas, found that approximately 70.4% of SMEs were either failing or experiencing stagnant growth, while only 29.6% were able to sustain their operations over time. The study further identified inadequate entrepreneurial and managerial capacity as a major contributing factor to the high failure rate. This suggests that the absence of effective strategic planning practices may be a key underlying issue affecting SME performance and sustainability. In this context, strategic planning emerges as a critical tool that can enhance decision-making, improve resource allocation, and strengthen the resilience of SMEs. By adopting structured strategic planning processes, SMEs can better position themselves to overcome operational challenges, exploit market opportunities, and achieve sustainable growth. Therefore, understanding the role of strategic planning in improving SME performance is essential, particularly within the Zambian context where failure rates remain high.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognized as engines of economic growth, innovation, and employment creation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017; World Bank, 2020). In Zambia, particularly within the manufacturing sector, SMEs play a vital role in driving industrialization and contributing to the country's development goals as outlined in the 8th National Development Plan and Vision 2030 (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2022). Despite their importance, many manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka face persistent challenges such as limited growth, high failure rates, and vulnerability to market fluctuations (Chisala, 2008; Nyoni & Bonga, 2018). One contributing factor is the absence or weak application of strategic planning, which are essential for setting long-term goals, allocating resources efficiently, and responding effectively to dynamic market conditions (Bryson, 2018; Kraus et al., 2016). This is supported by Majama and Magang (2017) who outlined that Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) frequently have difficulties when putting strategic planning procedures into place. This limitation may make it more difficult for them to engage in thorough strategic planning, which could result in reactive rather than proactive corporate initiatives. While strategic planning is well-documented in large organisations, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which manufacturing SMEs such as in Lusaka implement such plans. Existing anecdotal evidence suggests that many SMEs either operate without formal strategies or struggle to translate strategic plans into actionable outcomes due to financial constraints, managerial capacity limitations, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms (Mutalemwa, 2015; Mazanai & Fatoki, 2012). This gap in knowledge creates uncertainty for policymakers, business support organizations, and SME owners seeking to design interventions that can strengthen competitiveness and sustainability in the sector. Therefore, the problem underpinning this study is the lack of clear understanding of how, and to what extent, manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka implement strategic planning, and what implications this has for their performance and long-term survival. Without this understanding, policymakers, business support organizations, and SME owners will continue to design interventions without an evidence base, risking further deterioration of SME competitiveness, increased failure rates, and missed opportunities for industrial development in Zambia.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess the awareness on strategic planning practices among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district;
- ii. To establish how manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district implement strategic planning
- iii. To explore the challenges affecting the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical framework of this research paper considered two theories, namely Resource-Based View (RBV) and Contingency Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of strategic planning among SMEs.

#### 2.1.1 Resource- Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a firm-level perspective for explaining why some organisations achieve superior performance and sustain competitive advantage over others. The theory posits that organisational performance is largely determined by the resources and capabilities that a firm control and how effectively these resources are deployed (Barney, 1991). According to RBV, firms are heterogeneous in terms of the resources they possess, and this heterogeneity can persist over time because certain resources are difficult to imitate or substitute.

RBV categorises organisational resources into tangible and intangible assets, including physical resources, human capital, organisational processes, knowledge, and capabilities (Grant, 1991). Barney (1991) argues that resources contribute to sustained competitive advantage when they meet the VRIN criteria: they must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Strategic planning becomes an essential managerial process through which organisations identify, align, and deploy these strategic resources to achieve long-term objectives. This study adopted RBV to explain how the availability and effective utilisation of organisational resources influence the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs. It helps to assess whether differences in resources and capabilities explain variations in strategic planning implementation among SMEs.

### **2.1.2 Contingency Theory**

Contingency Theory provides a complementary perspective by emphasising the importance of the external environment and organisational context in shaping management practices and strategic decisions. The theory argues that there is no single best way to manage or implement strategy; instead, the effectiveness of organisational practices depends on the fit between internal structures and external environmental conditions (Donaldson, 2001). According to Contingency Theory, organisations must align their strategies, structures, and processes with contextual factors such as environmental uncertainty, organisational size, technology, and market dynamics (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Strategic planning implementation is therefore not a uniform process but one that varies depending on organisational and environmental circumstances. This study used Contingency Theory to examine how contextual factors such as firm size, managerial expertise, environmental uncertainty, and industry conditions influence the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka. The theory helps explain variations in strategic planning practices beyond internal resources alone.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Awareness of Strategic Planning Practices Among Manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District**

Strategic planning is recognized as a critical process for organizations aiming to define their long-term direction and enhance their competitiveness. In the context of manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District, awareness of strategic planning practices is generally high among business owners and managers. This awareness is crucial as it forms the foundation for effective strategic implementation. However, despite the recognition of its importance, many SMEs still operate without formalized strategic planning processes. Studies indicate that while a significant proportion of SMEs express awareness, this does not always translate into action, as many prioritize immediate operational concerns over long-term strategic initiatives (Abodunde, 2020). Moreover, the understanding of strategic planning among SMEs often varies, with many equating it to short-term operational tasks rather than a comprehensive, long-term approach. For instance, research shows that SMEs frequently focus on budgeting and forecasting rather than engaging in thorough environmental scanning or strategy formulation (Ali, 2018). This limited understanding can hinder the effective application of strategic planning, as it prevents SMEs from fully leveraging the benefits that structured planning can provide. Consequently, enhancing awareness and understanding of strategic planning is essential for fostering a culture that values long-term strategic initiatives (Akolo et al., 2018).

Training and exposure to strategic management concepts are vital for increasing awareness among SME owners and managers. Research indicates that many decision-makers lack formal training in strategic planning, which directly impacts their ability to implement effective strategies (Gatukui & Katuse, 2014). By providing targeted training programs that focus on strategic planning principles, SMEs can improve their understanding and application of these practices, ultimately leading to better organizational performance and sustainability (Madhani, 2010). Additionally, the role of external support organizations, such as government agencies and business associations, is crucial in promoting awareness of strategic planning among SMEs. Collaborative efforts to disseminate information and provide resources can help bridge the gap between awareness and practice. For example, programs that offer workshops or seminars on strategic planning can equip SMEs with the necessary tools and knowledge to develop formal plans (Addae-Korankye & Aryee, 2021). This external support can play a significant role in enhancing the overall strategic capabilities of SMEs in Lusaka District. In conclusion, while awareness of strategic planning practices is relatively high among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District, significant gaps remain in understanding and applying these concepts effectively. Addressing these gaps through targeted training and external support can enhance the capacity of SMEs to engage in strategic planning, ultimately contributing to their competitiveness and sustainability in a rapidly evolving business environment.

### **2.2.2 Implementation of Strategic Planning Among Manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District**

The implementation of strategic planning is a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly for manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District. However, research indicates that many SMEs struggle with translating strategic intentions into actionable plans. Effective implementation requires not only the development of formal

strategic plans but also the establishment of processes that facilitate continuous evaluation and adaptation (Hrebiniak, 2006). In Lusaka, the majority of SMEs engage in informal planning, often relying on basic tools such as SWOT analysis, while neglecting more sophisticated methodologies like PESTEL analysis or scenario planning (Dhlamini, 2021). One of the significant challenges faced by SMEs in implementing strategic planning is the lack of resources and managerial capacity. Many SMEs operate on tight budgets, which limits their ability to invest in strategic initiatives, training, and external consultancy services (Kihara, 2017). As a result, the strategic planning practices of these firms tend to be reactive rather than proactive, focusing on immediate operational issues rather than long-term growth and sustainability (Majama & Magang, 2017). This reactive approach can lead to missed opportunities and hinder the overall effectiveness of their strategic efforts.

Furthermore, the frequency of plan reviews and updates is notably low among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka. Many firms do not revisit their strategic plans regularly, which diminishes their ability to adapt to changing market conditions and align their operations with strategic objectives (Akolo et al., 2018). Continuous evaluation is essential for ensuring that strategic plans remain relevant and effective, yet the lack of systematic review processes among SMEs often results in outdated or ineffective strategies. Leadership commitment plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of strategic planning. Studies have shown that strong leadership support is necessary for fostering a culture that values strategic initiatives and encourages employee involvement (Ali, 2018). In many manufacturing SMEs, decision-making authority is concentrated among owners and senior managers, which can limit the inclusivity of the planning process and hinder the engagement of lower-level employees (Abdi, 2023). Encouraging broader participation in strategic planning can enhance ownership and commitment to the implementation of strategic initiatives.

To improve the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka, it is essential to establish performance monitoring systems that facilitate ongoing assessment and feedback. The use of tools such as the Balanced Scorecard can help SMEs align their operations with strategic objectives and track progress effectively (Mazzarol et al., 2014). By integrating performance measurement into their strategic planning processes, SMEs can enhance their ability to respond to challenges and seize opportunities in a dynamic business environment. In summary, while the potential benefits of strategic planning are recognized among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District, the actual implementation of these practices remains limited. Addressing the challenges of resource constraints, lack of managerial capacity, and insufficient leadership support is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of strategic planning among these firms. By fostering a culture of continuous evaluation and encouraging broader participation in the planning process, SMEs can improve their strategic capabilities and better position themselves for long-term success.

### **2.2.3 Challenges Affecting the Implementation of Strategic Planning Among Manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District**

The challenges faced by manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District regarding the implementation of strategic planning are multifaceted and stem from both internal and external factors. A primary challenge identified is the pressure of short-term operational demands, which often takes precedence over long-term strategic considerations. Many SMEs report that the immediate demands of daily operations hinder their ability to engage in systematic strategic planning, as they prioritize tasks that yield immediate results (Dhlamini, 2021). This focus on short-term survival can prevent firms from investing in the necessary planning processes that support long-term growth. Another significant barrier to effective strategic planning implementation is the lack of skills and expertise among SME owners and managers. Research indicates that many decision-makers in these firms lack formal training in strategic management, which limits their capacity to develop and execute comprehensive strategic plans (Abodunde, 2020). This skills gap can lead to a reliance on informal planning practices, which may not adequately address the complexities of the business environment. Consequently, the absence of strategic knowledge constrains the ability of SMEs to formulate and implement effective strategies.

Financial constraints also play a critical role in limiting the ability of SMEs to engage in structured strategic planning. Many firms operate with limited budgets, which restricts their capacity to invest in strategic initiatives, training, and consultancy services (Kihara, 2017). This financial pressure can create a cycle where SMEs prioritize immediate operational needs over long-term strategic investments, further exacerbating their challenges in implementing effective planning processes (Ali, 2018). Additionally, the lack of institutional support and access to reliable market information can impede effective strategic planning. Many SMEs report that they struggle to obtain the necessary guidance and training to enhance their strategic capabilities (Muchoka, 2020). Without access to relevant information and resources, SMEs may find it difficult to make informed strategic decisions, leading to a reliance on intuition rather than evidence-based planning. This lack of information can hinder their ability to identify opportunities and threats in the market, ultimately impacting their competitiveness. Resistance to change within the organization also presents a challenge to the implementation of strategic planning. Many SMEs experience internal

resistance from employees who may be hesitant to adopt new processes or strategies (Addae-Korankye & Aryee, 2021). This resistance can stem from a lack of understanding of the benefits of strategic planning or fear of the unknown. Overcoming this resistance requires effective change management strategies that engage employees and foster a culture of openness and adaptability.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

This study is guided by the pragmatism research philosophical paradigm, which allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods to address research questions effectively. Pragmatism supports a mixed-methods approach, focusing on what works best in understanding the complexities of strategic planning implementation among manufacturing SMEs.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, where quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The convergent parallel design was considered most appropriate for several reasons. First, the study seeks to examine the relationship between strategic planning and SME performance, which requires quantitative data to establish patterns, trends, and statistical associations. At the same time, the study aims to explore challenges and practical experiences associated with the formulation and implementation of strategic planning, which necessitates qualitative insights. The convergent design allows both forms of data to be collected simultaneously, ensuring that neither strand is prioritized over the other, thereby providing a more balanced and comprehensive analysis.

#### 3.3 Study Area

The study was carried out in Lusaka district, which is an industrial and commercial centre for the nation. According to the Zambia Statistics Agency (2022), Lusaka district has the largest population of 2,241,146 people, comprising 1,098,078 males and 1,143,068 females, and with the highest population density of 141.3 persons per square kilometre, making it ideal for this study as it is home to many customers and several medium- and large-scale.

#### 3.4 Target Population

The target population consisted of 195 registered SMEs in Lusaka District registered on the Zambia Association of Manufacturers' database as of 26<sup>th</sup> October 2025. In these organisations, this study further targeted business owners, managers and supervisors who are usually involved in strategic and operational management.

#### 3.5 Sampling techniques

The study utilized both stratified and purposive sampling. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to enhance representativeness, minimizing bias and ensuring that diverse sub-sectors within the manufacturing industry were included. Using the Yamane formula, the study employed a sample size of 131 SMEs drawn from the population of 195 SMEs registered with the Zambia Association of Manufacturers (ZAM) in Lusaka District.

#### 3.6 Data collection methods

Data were collected using two instruments: a structured questionnaire for quantitative data and a semi-structured interview guide for qualitative data. The questionnaire was designed based on established literature on strategic planning and SME performance, with items adapted from previously validated studies. It consisted of closed-ended questions measured on a Likert scale to capture key variables such as environmental scanning, strategy formulation, implementation, evaluation, and firm performance. The semi-structured interview guide was designed to obtain in-depth insights into the practical experiences and challenges of strategic planning among SMEs.

#### 3.7 Data Preparation and Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) via SPSS. Qualitative data was analysed thematically to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to strategic planning processes and performance, complementing quantitative findings.

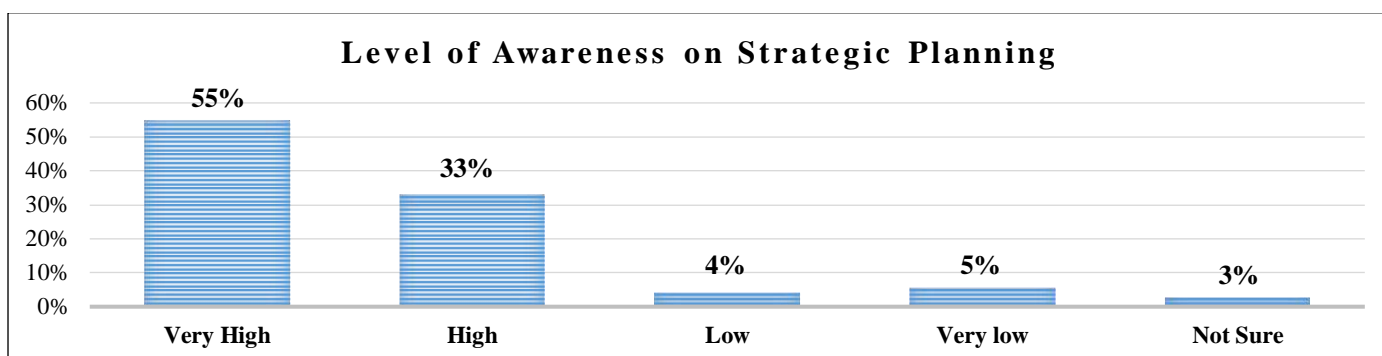
#### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. These findings are presented in line with the three study objectives. Out of the 131 SMEs targeted, 73 participated.

##### 4.1 To assess the awareness on strategic planning practices among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district

###### Level of Awareness on Strategic Planning

Including the Level of Awareness of Strategic Planning variable is important because it helps determine whether limited strategic planning among SMEs is due to lack of knowledge or other implementation barriers. By establishing that awareness exists, the study can more accurately identify the gap between understanding and practice, thereby guiding recommendations toward capacity building, skills development, and institutional support rather than basic awareness creation. Results are presented in Figure 1.

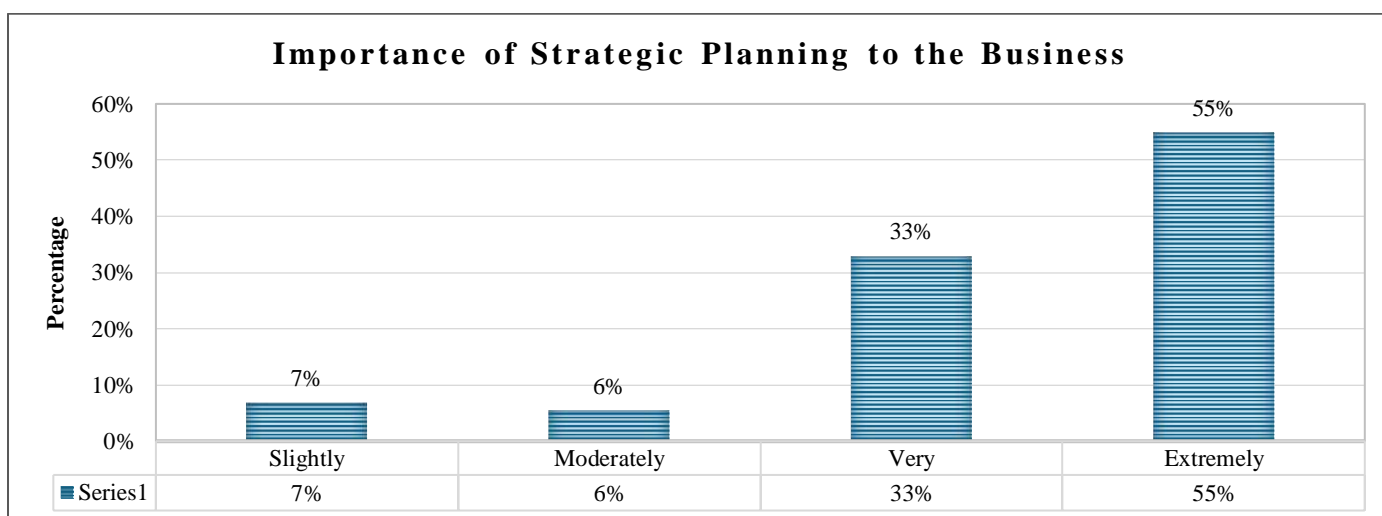


**Figure 1**  
*Level of Awareness on Strategic Planning*

The results show that awareness of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District is generally high. A majority of respondents (55%) or 40 rated their awareness as very high, while a further 33% or 24 indicated high awareness. This means that 88% or 64 SMEs possess strong awareness of strategic planning concepts, suggesting that knowledge of the importance of strategic planning is widespread within the sector

##### 4.1.1 Importance of Strategic Planning

Perceived importance affects the likelihood of adoption and resource allocation. This question helps link attitudes toward planning with actual implementation behaviour. Results are presented in Figure 2.

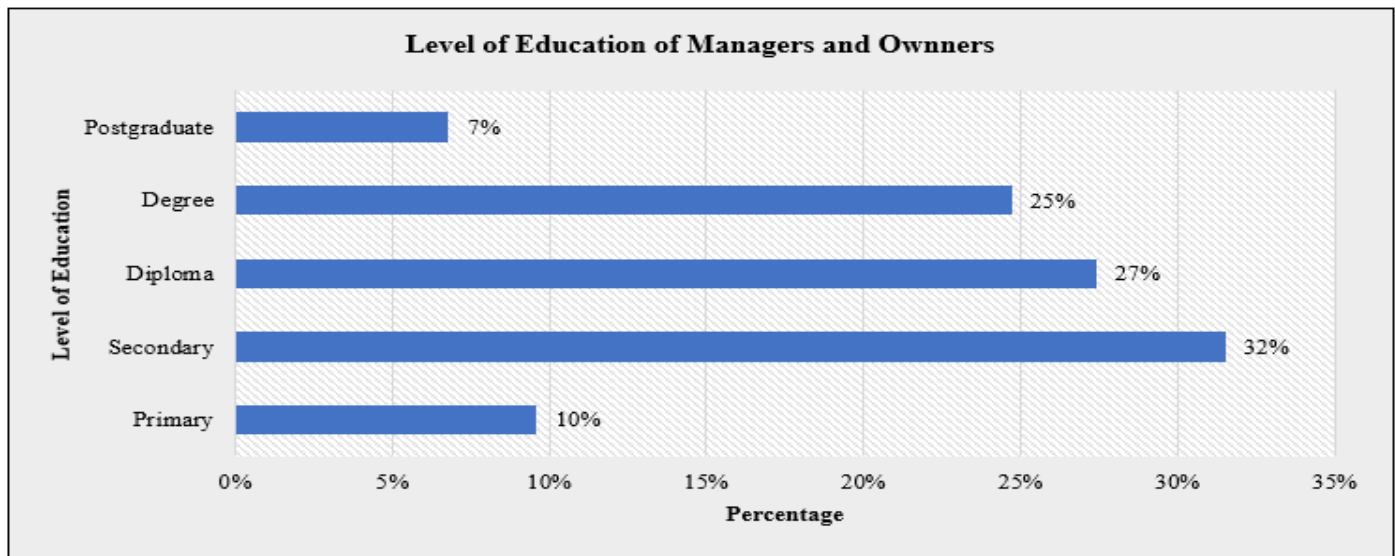


**Figure 2**  
*Importance of Strategic Planning to the Business*

Respondents rated the importance of strategic planning on a 5-point scale. Most participants indicated high to high importance with representation of 33 or 24 percent and 55% or 40 respectively, suggesting general recognition of its relevance for SME success.

### 4.1.2 Training in Strategic Planning

Understanding the level of education of SME owners and managers was considered important because it shapes their ability to understand, interpret, and apply strategic management concepts. Individuals with higher levels of education are generally expected to possess better analytical and decision-making capabilities, which are essential for developing and executing strategic plans.



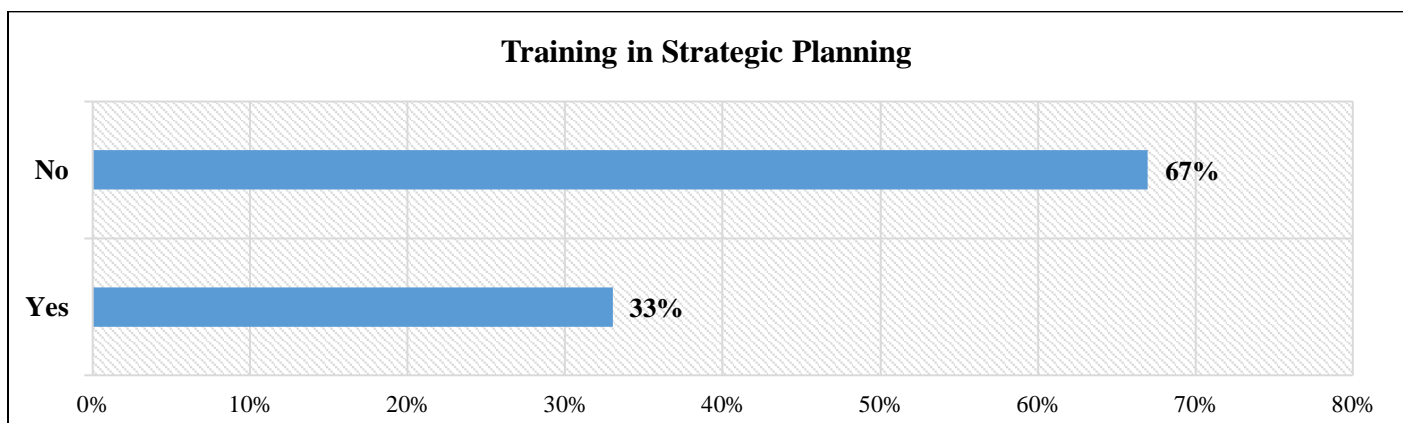
**Figure 3**  
*Level of Education of Managers and Owners*

The findings reveal that most SME owners/managers possess at least secondary education (32%) or 23, with a substantial proportion holding diplomas (27%) or 20, and degrees (25%) or 18. Only a small fraction of respondents have postgraduate qualifications representing 7% or 5. The results show a positive relationship between level of education and strategic planning implementation. Respondents with higher education levels (degree and postgraduate) demonstrate relatively higher levels of implementation compared to those with lower education levels.

However, despite this trend, overall implementation remains low to moderate across all categories. Notably, even among degree holders, less than half report high levels of implementation. This suggests that while education improves awareness and understanding of strategic planning, it does not automatically translate into effective execution.

### 4.1.3 Training in Strategic Planning

Training improves managerial competence and increases the likelihood of structured planning. This variable helps assess the role of capacity building in strategic planning adoption. The study sought to establish if the respondents have had training in strategic planning. Based on yes or No answer, the results are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 4**  
*Training in Strategic Planning*

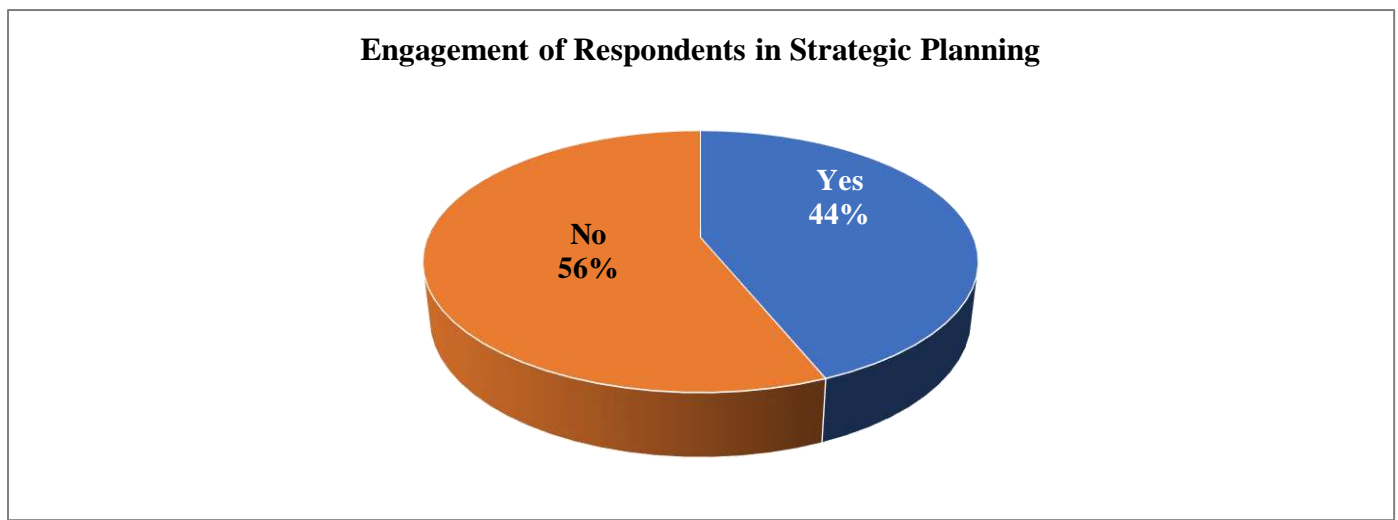
Some respondents indicated that they had received training representing 33 percent or 24, while the majority had not, representing 67 percent or 49. It can be argued that training provisions are a critical factor influencing the adoption and effectiveness of strategic planning.

#### 4.2 To establish how manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district implement strategic planning

This section examines how extensively SMEs develop and execute strategic plans.

##### 4.2.1 Engagement in Strategic Planning

This question establishes whether SMEs actually practice strategic planning. It acts as a screening and baseline variable for assessing the extent of implementation and identifying gaps between awareness and practice. The findings of the analysis are outlined in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 5**  
*Engagement in Strategic Planning*

The study explored whether firms actively participate in strategic planning and found that only 44 percent of respondents—32 firms—reported that they do, while the majority, 56 percent or 41 firms, indicated that they do not engage in such practices. This suggests that most SMEs still lack formal approaches to strategic planning. Further analysis revealed that engagement in strategic planning is more common among respondents with higher levels of education and among firms with greater managerial capacity. In contrast, smaller and less experienced firms are less likely to adopt strategic planning. Overall, these findings underscore that, although there is general awareness of the value of strategic planning, its actual implementation among SMEs remains limited.

##### 4.2.2 Participants in the Strategic Planning Process

Identifying who participates reveals the level of inclusiveness and leadership involvement in planning. Participation influences ownership, implementation success, and organizational alignment. The study asked the respondents which staff are involved in strategic planning with findings presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
*Participants in the Strategic Planning Process*

Personnel Involved in the Strategic Planning Process	Frequency	Percentage
All staff	4	6%
External consultants	16	22%
Managers	48	66%
Not sure	17	23%
Owner	32	44%

The analysis of personnel involved in the strategic planning process reveals that SMEs primarily rely on managerial and ownership-level participation. The majority of respondents (66%, n = 48) indicated that managers are the key participants in strategic planning, reflecting a top-down approach where planning responsibilities are concentrated among mid-level or senior management. Similarly, owners were actively involved in 44% (n = 32) of cases, highlighting the central role of business proprietors in guiding strategic direction, particularly in small and

closely-held enterprises. A smaller proportion of SMEs (22%,  $n = 16$ ) reported engaging external consultants, suggesting that some enterprises seek specialized expertise to support planning activities, although reliance on external input remains limited. Only 6% ( $n = 4$ ) of respondents indicated that all staff were involved in the planning process, suggesting that participatory or inclusive approaches are uncommon within SMEs. Notably, 23% ( $n = 17$ ) of respondents were unsure about who participates in strategic planning, which may indicate a lack of clarity or communication regarding planning processes within certain enterprises. These findings suggest that strategic planning in SMEs is predominantly a managerial and owner-driven process, with limited staff involvement and occasional external support. This concentration of planning responsibility may have implications for the inclusivity, effectiveness, and implementation of strategic initiatives within SMEs.

#### 4.2.3 Strategic Planning Practices

The study sought to establish whether respondents on the existence and comprehensiveness of strategic plans. This section measures how planning is conducted in practice, moving beyond perception to operational behaviour. It supports evaluation of the extent of strategy formulation and execution. The findings of the analysis are outlined in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

##### *Strategic Planning Practices*

Existence and comprehensiveness of strategic plans	N	Mean	Variance
Strategic plans guide innovation and competitiveness initiatives	73	3.7260	0.535
We have a written strategic plan	73	2.9178	1.771
Our strategic plan contains vision, mission, and SMART objectives	73	2.7808	1.062
Our plan is reviewed and updated at least annually	73	2.6164	.684
We use monitoring tools (KPIs, Balanced Scorecard) to track performance	73	2.5753	.831
We involve employees in the strategic planning process	73	2.5616	1.139
We allocate resources (budget, staff, time) based on the plan	73	2.4932	.920

The highest mean score (3.7260) was reported for the statement that strategic plans guide innovation and competitiveness initiatives, indicating that respondents generally perceive strategic planning as moderately to highly important for driving organizational growth. In contrast, the presence of a written strategic plan scored a mean of 2.9178, and inclusion of vision, mission, and SMART objectives scored 2.7808, reflecting moderate agreement but with significant variability, suggesting that formal documentation and foundational elements of strategic planning are not consistently applied. Annual plan review (mean = 2.6164), use of monitoring tools such as KPIs or the Balanced Scorecard (mean = 2.5753), employee involvement in planning (mean = 2.5616), and allocation of resources based on the plan (mean = 2.4932) all scored below the midpoint of the scale, indicating limited application of these practices. It can be noted that while strategic plans are recognized for guiding innovation and competitiveness, the low to moderate mean scores across other items suggest gaps in formalization, participatory engagement, monitoring, and resource alignment, which may constrain the effectiveness of strategic planning processes.

#### 4.2.4 Types of Strategic Planning Tools Used

The analysis of methodologies used in implementation of strategic planning reveals varying levels of adoption of formal planning tools among SMEs. From the qualitative point of view, some of the themes that were identified from the participants were as follows: SWOT Analysis, PESTEL Analysis, Porter's Five Forces, and Scenario Planning. Table 3 indicates that manufacturing SMEs rely more on basic and widely known strategic planning tools than on advanced or analytical tools.

**Table 3**

##### *Crosstabulation of Strategic Planning Tools Used (N = 73)*

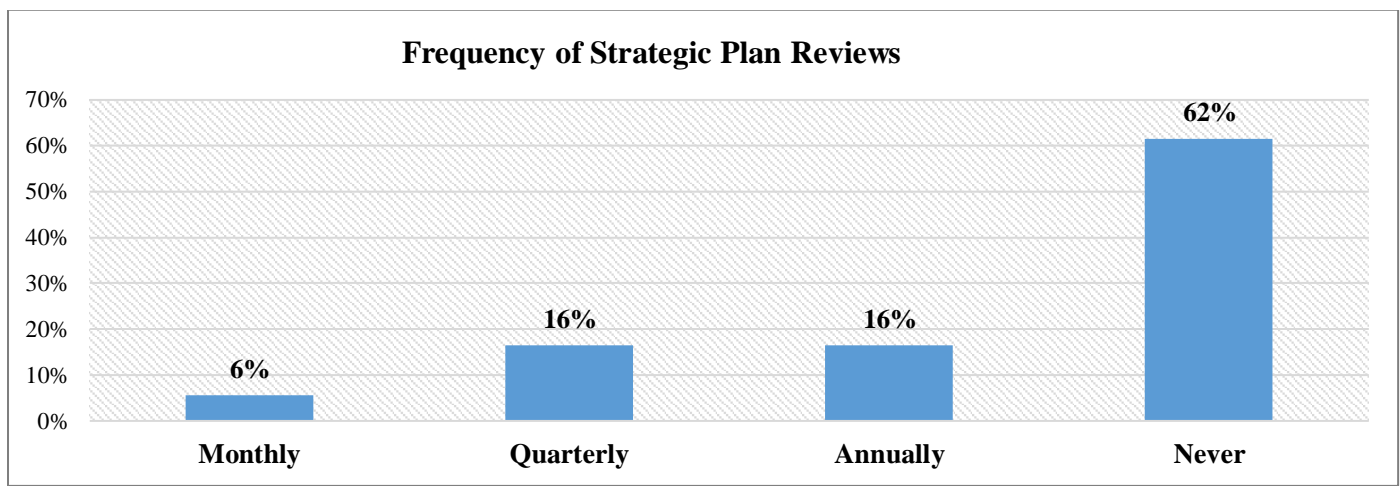
Strategic Planning Tools	Mostly Used (%)	Not Used (%)
SWOT Analysis	88.3	11.7
PESTEL Analysis	54.2	45.8
Porter's Five Forces	46.7	53.3
Scenario Planning	35.8	64.2
Business Model Canvas	41.7	58.3
Balanced Score Card	52.5	47.5

The most commonly used tool is SWOT Analysis (88.3%) or 64, showing that many firms prioritise simple situational analysis to guide decision-making. This is followed by PESTEL Analysis (54.2%) or 39 and the Balanced

Scorecard (52.5%) or 39, suggesting moderate adoption of environmental scanning and performance management practices. However, the findings show relatively low use of more sophisticated and forward-looking tools. Porter’s Five Forces (46.7%) or 34 and the Business Model Canvas (41.7%) or 31 are used by less than half of the firms, indicating limited industry and business model analysis. Scenario Planning is the least utilised tool (35.8%) or 26, suggesting that many SMEs may not actively prepare for uncertainty and future risks. The results imply that while awareness of strategic planning tools exists, SMEs tend to favour simpler techniques and underutilise advanced tools that support long-term strategic thinking and competitiveness.

#### 4.2.5 Frequency in strategic planning reviews

Regular reviews indicate how actively firms monitor and adapt their strategies. This variable measures the level of strategic discipline and responsiveness to environmental changes. Figure 5 outlines summary of outcomes of the frequencies.



**Figure 6**  
*Frequency of Strategic Plan Reviews*

A proportion of SMEs indicated that they currently engage in strategic planning, while others noted that they do not. Among those who engage in strategic planning, frequencies of plan review included monthly (6 percent) or 4, quarterly (16 percent) or 12, annually (16 percent) or 12, or not at all (62 percent) or 45. This reflected the degree of strategic monitoring and adaptability. These findings are reflected in the figure above.

### 4.3 To explore the challenges affecting the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district

This section presents findings on obstacles encountered by SMEs during strategic planning.

#### 4.3.1 Nature of Challenges

The study sought to establish the challenges being faced in strategic planning. The findings of the analysis are outlined in Table 4 below.

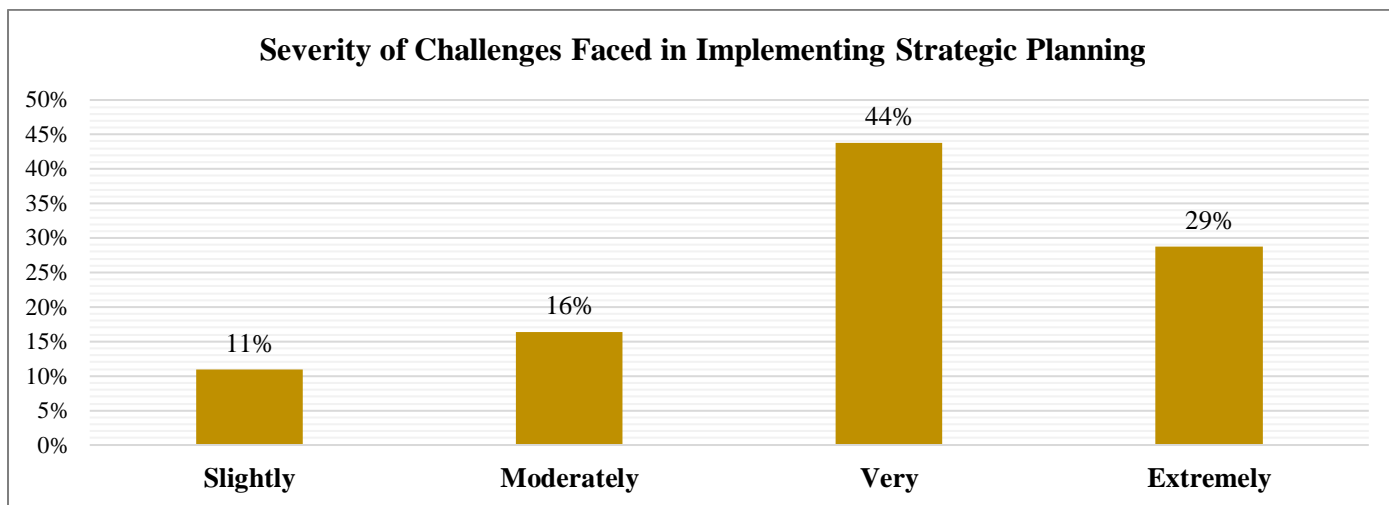
**Table 4**  
*Challenges Faced in Strategic Planning*

Challenges Faced in Strategic Planning	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Skills or Expertise	57	78%
Limited Financial Resources for Planning	32	44%
Resistance to Change	21	29%
Short-Term Operational Pressures Hinder Strategic Focus	60	82%
Resistance to Change Among Staff	16	22%
Time Constraints	12	16%
Lack of Information	45	62%
Unreliable or Costly Market Information	8	11%
Limited Government/Association Support for SME Strategic Planning	49	67%

SMEs’ strategic planning is most hindered by short-term operational pressures, followed by skill gaps, limited support and information, and then financial constraints and resistance to change.

### 4.3.2 Severity of Challenges

The study further went on to understand the severity of the challenges faced by the respondents. The findings of the analysis are outlined in Figure 6 below.



**Figure 7**  
*Severity of Challenges*

Participants rated the significance of these challenges from “Slightly” to “Extremely.” The majority of the SMEs reported being very severe at 44 percent or 32, 29 percent or 21 indicating extremely, while 16 percent indicated moderately, indicating substantial impediments to effective planning.

### 4.3.3 Strategies Used to Overcome Challenges

The study sought to understand what challenges are being used by the SMEs to overcome the challenges faced in strategic planning. The findings of the analysis are outlined in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**  
*Strategies Used to Overcome Challenges*

Theme	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Use of Meetings, Reviews, and Internal Operational Processes	Reliance on periodic management meetings, production reviews, and operational planning routines.	18	25%
Allocating Time and Space for Strategic Planning	Efforts to set aside dedicated time for planning, performance review, and forward-looking discussions.	16	22%
Persistence and Reactive Problem-Solving Approaches	Addressing challenges as they arise, reliance on short-term plans, and lack of systematic planning.	14	19%
Flexibility and Adaptability	Use of improvisation, resilience, and adaptability to address planning constraints.	12	16%
Capacity Building, Team Involvement, and External Support	Engagement of employees, internal expertise, consultants, and tools to improve planning.	10	14%

The thematic analysis demonstrates a complex blend of formal and informal approaches to strategic planning among SMEs, reflecting broader trends identified in both international and local literature. The most frequently occurring theme, the use of meetings, reviews, and internal operational processes (n = 18), indicates that SMEs often integrate planning activities into existing operational structures.

### 4.3.4 Desired Improvements or Support

The study sought to understand from SMEs on what improvements or support can enhance their strategic planning efforts. The findings of the analysis are outlined in Table 6 below.

**Table 6***Desired Improvements or Support*

Theme	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Training, Coaching, and Skills Development	Calls for training, coaching, expert guidance, and capacity building in strategic planning tools and techniques.	34	47%
Government and Institutional Support	Need for support from ministries, CEEC, ZAM, and business associations in training, empowerment, and orientation.	21	29%
Information Access, Digital Tools, and Market Insights	Need for information availability, digital tools, and market research to strengthen decision-making.	13	18%
Organisational Deliberateness, Accountability, and Governance	Need to be intentional, strengthen accountability structures, and involve boards and partners.	5	7%

Respondents most strongly emphasized training and skills development (47%) or 34, supported by government and institutional backing (29%) or 21, improved information and digital tools (18%) or 13, and smaller calls for stronger governance and accountability (7%) or 5.

**4.4 Additional Comments**

Respondents offered additional comments reflecting their experiences, needs, and perspectives on strategic planning. These are outlined in Table 7 below:

**Table 7***Additional Comments*

Theme	Description	Sample Quotes/Codes	Frequency
Importance of Strategic Planning for Sustainability and Competitiveness	Emphasis on planning as essential for avoiding losses, growth, competitiveness, and proactive risk management.	“Planning is critical for manufacturing.” “It is very important to have a strategic plan to be sustainable and grow businesses.” “Risks are treated proactively.”	16
Short-Term and Structural Challenges Hindering Long-Term Planning	SMEs and manufacturers struggle to focus on long-term planning due to operational pressures such as cashflow and power shortages.	“SMEs are facing cashflow problems.” “Our biggest hindrance is power.” “Short term challenges inhibit long-term thinking.”	12
Capacity Gaps: Need for Training, Tools, and Documented Plans	Respondents express need for training, templates, and formal documentation to support strategic planning.	“We need training and templates.” “We need documented plans.”	8
Need for Government and External Support	Calls for government involvement, especially funding and training programmes.	“Government can do more including funding.” “Training.”	4
Organisational Culture and Mindset Change	Notes on the need for objective-oriented thinking and development of learning organisations.	“Mindset of people must change.” “Encourage establishment of learning organisations.”	5
Neutral/Non-substantive Responses	Responses that did not contribute meaningfully to themes.	“None.” “Nil.”	8

The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that strategic planning plays a critical role in shaping the performance, competitiveness, and long-term viability of SMEs across different contexts. Consistent with international evidence, the summary table reflects that many SMEs engage in strategic planning to varying degrees, though the depth, formality, and effectiveness of these practices differ widely.

**4.5 Summary of Key Findings of the Study**

Summary of key findings of the study are outlined in Table 8. The findings show that manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka show only moderate, mostly informal and reactive strategic planning, largely hindered by limited skills, resources, information, and institutional support.

**Table 8***Summary of Key Findings*

Specific Objective	Key Findings
To assess the awareness on strategic planning practices among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district;	SMEs demonstrate moderate awareness of strategic planning, but understanding is often narrow, inconsistent, and largely unsupported by formal training, with many firms lacking exposure to comprehensive planning tools.
To establish how manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district implement strategic planning;	Strategic planning among SMEs is largely informal, reactive, and embedded in daily operations, with limited use of formal tools and inconsistent plan review and implementation practices.
To explore the challenges affecting the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka district.	Strategic planning is constrained by short-term operational pressures, financial limitations, lack of skills, limited access to information, and weak institutional support.

**4.6 Discussion****4.6.1 Assessing Awareness of Strategic Planning Practices Among Manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District**

The study examined respondents' awareness of strategic planning by first establishing whether their firms actively engage in strategic planning activities. The findings revealed that 44 percent of SMEs reported participating in strategic planning, while a larger proportion (56 percent) indicated that they do not engage in such practices. This imbalance suggests that although a significant number of SMEs acknowledge and undertake strategic planning, more than half continue to operate without structured or formalized planning processes. Among SMEs that engage in strategic planning, the frequency of plan review varied considerably: 6 percent reviewed plans monthly, 16 percent quarterly, 16 percent annually, whereas a substantial 62 percent reported that they never conduct reviews. These results highlight inconsistent monitoring practices and limited strategic adaptability, as effective strategic planning requires periodic assessment to align organizational objectives with changing market conditions. The study also investigated which personnel were involved in the strategic planning process. Findings indicated that strategic planning is predominantly carried out by managers and owners, with minimal involvement from general staff and occasional reliance on external consultants. This concentration of planning authority at the leadership level suggests a centralized decision-making approach that may constrain the inclusiveness and depth of the planning process. Limited employee participation may also weaken the implementation of strategic initiatives, as staff involvement is critical for fostering commitment, enhancing organizational learning, and ensuring alignment between strategy and daily operations.

Further, respondents were asked to rate the importance of strategic planning to their organizations. A majority expressed strong recognition of its relevance, with 33 percent rating strategic planning as highly important and 55 percent as very highly important. This demonstrates a broad awareness among SMEs of the value of strategic planning in guiding organizational direction, enhancing performance, and supporting long-term growth. However, when evaluating specific perceptions of strategic planning, respondents showed varied levels of agreement across key components. While many acknowledged its usefulness for goal setting and resource alignment, lower levels of agreement were observed regarding the use of monitoring tools, structured evaluation processes, and environmental analysis. These patterns reveal a gap between conceptual appreciation of strategic planning and its practical, systematic application.

When compared with the literature, the study's findings align with established evidence indicating that SMEs, both globally and regionally, often recognize the theoretical importance of strategic planning but face challenges in implementing it consistently and comprehensively. Studies by Kamariotou (2022), Dhlamini (2021), and Addae-Korankye and Aryee (2021) similarly report that despite acknowledging the value of strategic planning, many SMEs lack the expertise, resources, or structural capacity to translate strategic intent into formalized processes. Additionally, the dominance of owner-driven planning observed in this study corresponds with findings from Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia, where planning activities are often informal, unstructured, and heavily centralized. The limited review cycles and inadequate monitoring practices also mirror regional scholarship suggesting that SMEs frequently prioritize short-term operational concerns over long-term strategic considerations. Overall, the findings reinforce the broader literature by demonstrating that while awareness and perceived importance of strategic planning are relatively high, significant gaps remain in knowledge, institutional capacity, and execution of strategic planning practices.

**4.6.2 Implementation of Strategic Planning by Manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District**

The findings on the extent of strategic planning implementation reveal a mixed landscape in the adoption and execution of strategic planning practices among SMEs. Overall, the results indicate that while respondents recognise the value of strategic planning, particularly in driving innovation and competitiveness, the actual application of structured and comprehensive planning processes remains limited. The quantitative results demonstrate a clear

disparity between perceived importance and actual practice. The highest mean score was recorded for the role of strategic plans in guiding innovation and competitiveness, suggesting that respondents acknowledge the strategic function of planning in enhancing organisational performance. However, significantly lower mean scores were observed for foundational elements such as the existence of written strategic plans, inclusion of vision and mission statements, and incorporation of SMART objectives. Equally low scores for annual plan reviews, use of monitoring tools, employee involvement, and resource alignment illustrate notable gaps in formalisation and implementation. These findings suggest that although SMEs appreciate the strategic value of planning, many lack systematic processes, structures, or capabilities to translate strategic intentions into actionable and continuously managed plans.

The data on methodological tools further highlights the uneven adoption of structured planning approaches. SWOT analysis emerged as the most commonly used tool, reflecting a preference for basic, low-resource techniques. PESTEL analysis also appeared to be moderately used, suggesting some awareness of environmental scanning. However, the limited uptake of more advanced tools such as scenario planning, Porter's Five Forces, and AI-based approaches indicates restricted analytical capacity and minimal exposure to diversified strategic methodologies. The substantial proportion of SMEs not using any formal methodology underscores existing capability gaps and aligns with literature emphasising constraints related to skills, time, and resources. Respondents' understanding and conceptualisation of strategic planning further reinforce these findings. While a large proportion viewed strategic planning as planning for future growth and direction, others equated it with functional activities like budgeting, forecasting, or marketing. The small percentage associating strategic planning with environmental and risk analysis suggests incomplete understanding of core strategic processes, particularly those linked to external assessment and long-term positioning. Additionally, the varied frequency of plan updates and limited training, reported by the majority, illustrate inconsistencies in how strategic planning is integrated into organisational routines.

These results mirror regional and international literature, which consistently highlights the positive relationship between structured strategic planning and SME performance, innovation, and competitiveness. Studies from Kenya, Nigeria, and other contexts indicate that strategic planning contributes to improved financial and non-financial outcomes. However, they also emphasise that SMEs often prioritise short-term operational challenges over long-term strategic development, a pattern reflected in this study. Similarly, evidence from researchers such as Kamariotou (2022) and Wijetunge (2014) confirms that SMEs commonly adopt planning only partially or informally due to capability constraints and volatile environments. The findings also align with Ali's (2018) review, which suggests that the strength of the strategic planning–performance relationship is contingent on contextual factors such as firm size and environmental turbulence.

Therefore, the study revealed that while SMEs demonstrate a conceptual appreciation for strategic planning, their practices remain largely informal, underdeveloped, and inconsistently applied. The limited use of comprehensive methodologies, inadequate training, and gaps in monitoring and implementation structures highlight the need for capacity-building interventions. Strengthening analytical capabilities, enhancing awareness of strategic tools, and promoting structured planning processes could support SMEs in leveraging strategic planning more effectively to improve performance and competitiveness.

#### **4.6.3 Exploring Challenges Affecting the Implementation of Strategic Planning Among Manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District**

The study sought to identify the challenges faced by SMEs in undertaking strategic planning, revealing a range of internal and external constraints that collectively inhibit the implementation of effective strategic plans. The most frequently reported challenge was short-term operational pressure, cited by 20 percent ( $n = 60$ ) of respondents. This finding suggests that many SMEs struggle to balance the immediate demands of day-to-day operations with the long-term requirements of strategic thinking, a dilemma commonly observed in resource-constrained environments. In addition, 19 percent ( $n = 57$ ) cited lack of skills or expertise, highlighting a deficit in the technical and managerial competencies required to design and implement comprehensive strategic plans. Relatedly, limited government or association support (16%,  $n = 49$ ) and lack of information (15%,  $n = 45$ ) point to systemic and informational barriers that restrict SMEs' access to guidance, training, and market intelligence. Resource limitations also emerged prominently, with 11 percent ( $n = 32$ ) of respondents identifying inadequate financial resources as a barrier to structured planning. Human-related challenges further compounded these constraints, with resistance to change (7%,  $n = 21$ ) and staff resistance (5%,  $n = 16$ ) signalling the influence of organisational culture and employee attitudes on strategic adoption. Less frequently cited but still significant were time constraints (4%,  $n = 12$ ) and the high cost or unreliability of market information (3%,  $n = 8$ ), suggesting gaps in managerial capacity and information accessibility. Overall, these challenges indicate that SMEs face a combination of capability deficits, organisational barriers, and structural constraints that undermine their ability to institutionalise strategic planning. The study also assessed the perceived severity of these challenges. A majority of SMEs characterised the challenges as either very severe (44%) or extremely severe (29%), while 16 percent indicated moderate severity. These perceptions underscore the substantial

impediments confronting SMEs and the magnitude of the difficulties they experience in embedding formal strategic planning practices within their operations.

To further understand how SMEs attempt to overcome these barriers, a thematic analysis was conducted. The most frequently identified theme was reliance on meetings, reviews, and internal operational processes ( $n = 18$ ). This reliance suggests that many SMEs integrate aspects of planning into existing routines rather than adopting formalised strategic planning frameworks. This tendency aligns with findings by Majama and Magang (2017) and Abdi (2023), who noted that SMEs often substitute structured planning with routine managerial practices due to resource and skills constraints. Similarly, the theme of allocating time and space for planning ( $n = 16$ ) demonstrates intentional but inconsistent efforts to engage in strategic activities. This aligns with Nkutt et al. (2024) and Nyamwazwa (2014), who observed that SMEs often undertake planning at specific points in the business cycle but struggle to sustain continuity due to operational pressures. Flexibility and adaptability ( $n = 12$ ) also emerged as a recurring theme, reflecting an environment where SMEs rely on informal and emergent strategies to navigate uncertainty. This finding supports literature highlighting SMEs' adaptability, but also their tendency to rely on reactive rather than systematic planning (Kamariotou, 2022; Lal et al., 2024). Similarly, themes related to persistence and reactive problem-solving ( $n = 14$ ) illustrate that many SMEs continue to address challenges as they arise rather than through proactive planning. This reactive orientation mirrors evidence from Dhlamini (2021) and Muchoka (2020), which suggests that limited managerial capacity and financial constraints push SMEs toward short-term, survival-driven decision-making at the expense of longer-term strategic investments.

Another theme that emerged was the role of capacity building, team involvement, and external support ( $n = 10$ ). Respondents highlighted training, collaboration, and consultant support as mechanisms that could enhance strategic planning efforts. This theme aligns with findings from Addae-Korankye and Aryee (2021), Nachilongo and Kabubi (2025), and Mulenga (2023), who emphasise the importance of human capital, strategic competencies, and collaborative structures in supporting SME performance. The emergence of this theme suggests a growing recognition among SMEs of the need for structured, inclusive, and skill-enhancing approaches to strategic planning. The study also sought respondents' views on improvements or support needed to strengthen their strategic planning processes. The thematic findings indicate that SMEs require training and capacity development, consistent with global and regional literature identifying knowledge gaps as a central challenge (Kamariotou, 2022; Lal et al., 2024). The call for government and institutional support mirrors findings from Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana (Abdi, 2023; Addae-Korankye & Aryee, 2021), where public institutions play a critical role in providing training, information, and support structures for SMEs. Financial constraints highlighted by respondents echo Zambian evidence showing that limited cash flow and capital restrict strategic planning adoption (Muchoka, 2020; Mulenga, 2023). Moreover, respondents' interest in digital tools and improved market insights aligns with global scholarship emphasising digital transformation as a key enabler of strategic competitiveness (Mulyaningsih et al., 2021; Lo & Sugiarto, 2021). Finally, the need for improved internal governance reinforces literature stressing the importance of leadership commitment, organisational culture, and accountability structures in supporting strategic alignment.

Overall, the findings in this subsection reinforce literature-wide consensus that although strategic planning offers substantial benefits for SME performance, its institutionalisation is hindered by internal capability deficits, limited financial and informational resources, and environmental unpredictability. The convergence between the study's findings and international, regional, and Zambian literature underscores persistent systemic challenges and highlights the need for targeted interventions such as capacity development, financial support, digital integration, and enhanced organisational governance to enable SMEs to effectively engage in and sustain strategic planning practices.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that only 44 percent of manufacturing SMEs actively engage in strategic planning. Among those that do, the development of structured processes such as written plans, environmental scanning, SMART objective setting, and formal review mechanisms is notably weak. This concentration of planning authority among owners and managers limits inclusivity and may diminish staff commitment and organizational learning. Furthermore, review cycles are infrequent, with a significant proportion of SMEs failing to revisit their plans, which reduces the responsiveness and adaptability of their strategies. Additionally, the extent of strategic planning implementation was found to be uneven. Although respondents acknowledged the conceptual relevance of strategic planning, the adoption of structured methodologies was largely restricted to basic tools like SWOT analysis. More advanced tools, such as scenario planning, PESTEL analysis, Porter's Five Forces, and digital or AI-based methods, were rarely utilized. This indicates significant gaps in analytical capacity and exposure to comprehensive strategic frameworks, resulting in practices that remain largely informal and operationally driven.

The study also identified numerous challenges that hinder the institutionalization of strategic planning among SMEs. These challenges include short-term operational pressures, a lack of skills or expertise, inadequate government or institutional support, financial constraints, limited access to market information, and internal resistance to change. Respondents perceived these challenges as highly severe, suggesting that they substantially impede effective strategic planning. The thematic analysis confirmed that many SMEs rely on reactive and routine decision-making processes rather than engaging in long-term strategic thinking. However, respondents acknowledged the potential value of capacity building, external support, improved governance structures, and enhanced access to information as facilitators for better strategic planning outcomes. This study examined the implementation of strategic planning among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka District and found that while these firms recognize the importance of strategic planning, their adoption and implementation of such practices are limited. Key challenges identified include inadequate resources, a lack of expertise, and operational pressures. Overall, strategic planning practices among manufacturing SMEs in Lusaka are informal and underdeveloped, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to enhance competitiveness and sustainability.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be made to improve strategic planning practices among manufacturing SMEs. First, the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry (MCTI), the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises Development, and the Zambia Association of Manufacturers (ZAM) should collaborate to design and deliver structured capacity-building programs for SME owners and managers. These programs should focus on practical strategic planning skills, tools, and methodologies, including SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, and the Balanced Scorecard. Secondly, ZAM, the Citizens Economic Empowerment Commission (CEEC), and relevant training institutions should develop and distribute simplified strategic planning toolkits. These toolkits should include practical templates, step-by-step guidelines, and digital resources to assist SMEs in creating written strategic plans, setting SMART objectives, and conducting thorough environmental analyses.

Thirdly, the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ), through MCTI, should strengthen institutional and policy frameworks by integrating strategic planning support into national SME development programs, such as the 8th National Development Plan. This integration will ensure that strategic planning is prioritized within the broader context of SME growth and development. Finally, SME owners and managers should actively pursue collaboration with government agencies, ZAM, CEEC, and business support organizations. By accessing advisory services, market intelligence, and peer-learning networks, SMEs can strengthen their strategic planning capacity and enhance their overall competitiveness in the marketplace.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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